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Morality Made Visible

Edward Westermarck's Moral and Social Theory



Otto Pipatti

Morality Made Visible

While highly respected among evolutionary scholars, the sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Edward Westermarck is now largely forgotten in the social sciences. This book is the first full study of his moral and social theory, focusing on the key elements of his theory of moral emotions as presented in *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* and summarised in *Ethical Relativity*. Examining Westermarck's evolutionary approach to the human mind, the author introduces important new themes to scholarship on Westermarck, including the pivotal role of emotions in human reciprocity, the evolutionary origins of human society, social solidarity, the emergence and maintenance of moral norms and moral responsibility. With attention to Westermarck's debt to David Hume and Adam Smith, whose views on human nature, moral sentiments and sympathy Westermarck combined with Darwinian evolutionary thinking, *Morality Made Visible* highlights the importance of the theory of sympathy that lies at the heart of Westermarck's work, which proves to be crucial to his understanding of morality and human social life. A rigorous examination of Westermarck's moral and social theory in its intellectual context, this volume connects Westermarck's work on morality to classical sociology, to the history of evolutionism in the social and behavioural sciences, and to the sociological study of morality and emotions, showing him to be the forerunner of modern evolutionary psychology and anthropology. In revealing the lasting value of his work in understanding and explaining a wide range of moral phenomena, it will appeal to scholars of sociology, anthropology and psychology with interests in social theory, morality and intellectual history.

Otto Pipatti is a researcher in the Department of Social Research at the University of Helsinki, Finland.

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Morality Made Visible

Edward Westermarck's Moral
and Social Theory

Otto Pipatti



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Abbreviations

E	Hume, D. (1978). <i>Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press.
ER	Westermarck, E. (1932). <i>Ethical Relativity</i> . London: Paul Kegan.
HHM	Westermarck, E. (1891). <i>The History of Human Marriage</i> . London: Macmillan.
HHM I	Westermarck, E. (1921). <i>The History of Human Marriage vol. 1</i> . London: Macmillan.
HHM II	Westermarck, E. (1921). <i>The History of Human Marriage vol. 2</i> . London: Macmillan.
HHM III	Westermarck, E. (1921). <i>The History of Human Marriage vol. 3</i> . London: Macmillan.
MML	Westermarck, E. (1929). <i>Memories of My Life</i> . New York: The Macaulay Company.
ODMI I	Westermarck, E. (1906). <i>The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas vol. 1</i> . London: Macmillan.
ODMI II	Westermarck, E. (1908). <i>The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas vol. 2</i> . London: Macmillan.
T	Hume, D. (1978). <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press.
TMS	Smith, A. (1982). <i>The Theory of Moral Sentiments</i> . Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

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Introduction

This book offers an overall interpretation of the Finnish sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Edward Westermarck's (1862–1939) moral and social theory. The study has two main aims. First, it lays out the key features of Westermarck's theory of how people make moral judgements, the nature of emotions in which these judgements are based, and the psychological and social elements influencing them. At the same time, this study shows that Westermarck's moral theory is an ambitious and wide-ranging analysis of the fundamentals of human social behaviour and social reality. By combining these moral-psychological and sociological aspects of Westermarck's work, this book reconstructs his understanding of emotions, and the different forms of emotional contagion in particular, as the fundamental elements of human sociality. The second aim of this book is to explore Westermarck's thought in the context of his main sources of inspiration, enabling a better understanding of his work. Westermarck's theory of morality is based on a combination of eighteenth-century British moral philosophy, Darwinian evolutionism and the comparative method employed as a means of tracing resemblances and differences between different cultures and societies as well as human and animal behaviour. In this regard, this study highlights the importance of Darwinian evolutionary theory to the different aspects of Westermarck's project. In addition, it demonstrates how Westermarck's theory of moral emotions developed out of, and in response to, David Hume's and Adam Smith's study of moral sentiments.

Taken as a whole, this book aims to show that one of the great strengths of Westermarck's work is that he succeeds in making visible a wide range of elementary features of human social and moral life. It provides tools for understanding and explaining their various regularities, which are often so mundane and self-evident that they are ordinarily taken for granted. The first part of this book focuses on the central elements in Westermarck's moral and social theory, especially with respect to the nature of moral emotions, the role of sympathy, human reciprocity, the emergence and maintenance of moral norms and moral responsibility. The remaining part of the study expands upon and deepens these discussions by looking at Westermarck's ideas in relation to the sentimentalist tradition in British moral thought, whose importance Westermarck himself emphasised as the background for his thinking.

2 Introduction

Scholarship on Westermarck's work on morality has been largely concerned with the moral-philosophical aspects and broader historical contexts of his thought (Stroup, 1981, 1982a, 1982b; Ihanus, 1999; Kronqvist, 2014; Lagerspetz et al., 2017). This study examines Westermarck's theory of morality as a contribution to the social sciences and introduces his scholarly legacy to an audience which remains largely unfamiliar with his work. For reasons related to the divergence between sociology and anthropology in the decades around the Second World War, Westermarck has been usually considered as an anthropologist rather than sociologist. He has been excluded from the history of British sociology and, more generally, European sociology.¹ But at the same time, anthropologists and the historians of the discipline make mainly occasional and superficial references to Westermarck.²

As a result, we have a paradoxical situation where a sociologist who has probably written about emotions more than any other social scientist is completely neglected within the field of sociology of emotions (Barbalet, 2001, 2002; Shilling, 2002; Turner & Stets 2005; Stets & Turner, 2006, 2014). Not only is Westermarck ignored in the sociological discussions of moral emotions (Turner & Stets, 2006; Harkness & Hitlin, 2014), he is also forgotten among scholars in the quest for tracing the role of emotions in classical sociology and social theory. Similarly, the recent efforts to link the study on morality more explicitly to sociology have occurred without considering Westermarck's pioneering position (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010), and the same applies to the emergence of the anthropology of morality (Zigon, 2008; Lambek, 2010; Fassin, 2012). However, by recognising and theorising the role of morality as the core of human social life, Westermarck was doing exactly what has been missing in sociological and anthropological literature for a long time. At the same time, this book aims to incorporate Westermarck into the philosophical and historical scholarship on the legacy of David Hume and Adam Smith, where his many and varied efforts to develop their work have gone largely unnoticed.

The last twenty years or so have seen a steadily growing interest in Westermarck's work. He is increasingly recognised as a precursor of human sociobiology and evolutionary psychology (Hiatt, 2004; Fry, 2006, 2011; Roos, 2008; Salter, 2008; Hrdy, 2010; Sanderson, 2012, 2017; Rotkirch, 2017). However, Westermarck remains mainly known for his theory of incest avoidance (the so-called Westermarck effect), and his broader work on moral emotions has rarely been featured in the literature on the evolution of morality. Frans de Waal, one of the world's leading primatologists, has been especially instrumental in drawing attention to Westermarck's legacy. In his view, Westermarck 'deserves a central

1 See e.g. the special issue on the history of British sociology in *The Sociological Review*, 55(3); Holmwood & Scott (2014); Halsey & Runciman (2005); Renwick (2012, 2014).

2 For more detailed accounts of Westermarck's place in the history of anthropology, see Stroup (1984); Stocking (1995); Ihanus (1999); Lyons (2017); Shankland (2014a, 2014b); Lagerspetz & Suolinna (2014). For short comments, see Kuper (1988, 1990); Young (2004).

position in any debate about the origin of morality, since he was the first scholar to promote an integrated view including both humans and animals and both culture and evolution' (de Waal, 2006, p. 17).

Life and work

Westermarck grew up in a wealthy, academic Swedish-speaking family in Helsinki, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Finland, then an autonomous part of the Russian Empire. As an undergraduate at the Imperial Alexander University of Finland (University of Helsinki), he became much attracted to British empiricist philosophers such as Locke, Hume, Spencer and Mill and focused on psychology and philosophy. At the same time, with the guidance of Spencer and especially Darwin's *Descent of Man*, Westermarck's interests gravitated towards evolutionary thought. He was much influenced by liberal ideas of universal individual rights and the criticism of religion that spread among student circles in the 1880s (MML; Westermarck, 1925). Having embraced an agnostic mindset, he criticised the political and social influence of Christianity for the rest of his life. Westermarck advocated, both in scholarly writings and social activities, legal reforms relating to the liberalisation of divorce laws, the juridical equality of spouses, the position of unmarried women and adulterine children and the decriminalisation of homosexuality (Timosaari, 2017). His views on the legitimacy of law reveal the influence of John Stuart Mill's harm principle, according to which criminal law should only be concerned with acts that cause harm to others (Timosaari, 2017).

During his career, Westermarck held teaching positions in Finland and England. Shortly after finishing his doctoral thesis on the origin of marriage (1889), Westermarck was appointed docent (lecturer) in sociology at the University of Helsinki. Between 1906 and 1918, he held a chair in practical (i.e., moral and social) philosophy in Helsinki, and the professorship also included the teaching of sociology and social anthropology. Since 1918, he served as a professor of philosophy at the Åbo Akademi University. Westermarck worked at The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) from 1903 until his retirement in 1930. He was appointed lecturer in sociology for a three-year term in 1904, after which he took up a five-year appointment as a professor of sociology. Westermarck's position was converted into a permanent part-time professorship in 1912.³

For many years, he divided his time between Finland, London and Morocco, lecturing and holding seminars at LSE during the summer term. Westermarck was a very modest man and much liked among students and colleagues (Montagu, 1982; May, 1940). He loved the outdoors and observing nature and animals, and tells that 'I have spent many of the happiest years of my life alone among social classes and peoples other than the ones I belong – fishermen, peasants, robbers, the English, Italians', or a particular 'mountain tribe in Morocco' (Westermarck, 1927, p. 344).

3 For a precise account of Westermarck's appointment in LSE, see Husbands (2014, pp. 168–171).

4 Introduction

Westermarck contributed to three main areas of research: marriage and sexuality, Moroccan ethnography and the origins of morality. He presented his theory of incest avoidance originally in *The History of Human Marriage* (1891a), laying the foundation for current psychological, anthropological and biological study on the subject (Wolf & Durham, 2004; Wolf, 2014; Cartwright, 2016; Lieberman & Antfolk, 2015). The Westermarck effect proposes that there is normally a lack of sexual attraction between persons who have been in close contact with each other during the early childhood of either one. In addition, this sexual indifference is combined with emotional aversion if such acts are thought of (HMM II, pp. 192–194). Because Westermarck linked the origins of these emotional tendencies to the harmful genetic consequences of inbreeding, the Westermarck effect is often referred to as one of the earliest sociobiological or evolutionary psychological hypotheses on human behaviour. However, only a few anthropologists and psychologists have noticed that Westermarck's work on incest avoidance and incest taboo is actually a part of his broader theory of moral emotions and the origin and nature of moral rules.

The History of Human Marriage is an encyclopaedic study of family formation and different marriage practices around the world. The extended and thoroughly updated three-volume version of the book was published in 1921. This early work of Westermarck's influenced the development of anthropology by refuting the assumption of primitive promiscuity, which dominated the late nineteenth-century anthropological thought. During this time, leading anthropologists and evolutionary thinkers assumed that early humans – like some still existing 'savages' – lived in the state of unregulated sexual promiscuity. These scholars viewed monogamy as the end product of civilisational development, and as such a relatively recent phenomenon in human history. After reviewing the body of ethnological, historical and zoological evidence, Westermarck concluded that the origins of the pair bond can be traced to the biological evolution of the human species and especially to the evolutionary significance of parental care.⁴ Family is, for Westermarck, a universal human institution based upon a particular set of emotions, the most important of which are maternal and paternal affection, pair-bond attachment, sexual jealousy, filial and sibling attachment and incest aversion (Sarmaja, 2003). Subsequently, promiscuity theory continued to live mainly in Marxist social thought.

Another important part of Westermarck's legacy consists of his extensive ethnographic study of Morocco, focusing on marriage and religious and magical practices (Westermarck, 1914, 1926a, 1926b). Between 1898 and 1914, he spent a total of six years in the field, including over two years without a break at the beginning of the century. Westermarck was one of the first to emphasise the necessity of long-term stay among the people studied and of mastery of local

4 For an excellent discussion of Westermarck's criticism of promiscuity hypothesis, see Lyons & Lyons (2004, pp. 99–114). The first seven chapters of *The History of Human Marriage*, dealing with the promiscuity theory, consist of Westermarck's (1889) doctoral thesis.

languages and dialects. He also adopted early on a principle of using only the information obtained from his local informants and allowed their descriptions to represent only the customs and beliefs of their own community.⁵ Westermarck is a neglected pioneer in developing the methods of ethnography, conveying his experiences to his disciples in Finland and England (Lindberg, 2008; Lagerspetz, 2017). They include Bronislaw Malinowski (1937), who praised Westermarck as a scholar ‘whose personal teaching and to whose work I owe more than any other scientific influence’ (p. xvi).

Finally, Westermarck’s work on morality is both social scientific and philosophical in content. The impetus for Westermarck’s major contribution to the sociology and anthropology of morality, the monumental 1,500-page study *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* (1906–1908), arose from a debate on the extent to which a wrongdoer should be treated with kindness. Despite careful reflection, consensus was not reached, and this led Westermarck to reflect on ‘[w]hy do moral ideas in general differ so greatly? And, on the other hand, why is there in many cases such a wide agreement? Nay, why are there any moral ideas at all?’ (ODMI, p. 2). The core of his work is characterised by the attempt to discern between the universal features and the cultural and historical variations in morality, and to trace the underlying causes of these similarities and differences. The first quarter of the study deals with Westermarck’s ‘general theory of the nature of moral consciousness’, which he attempts to vindicate by ‘the comparative and historical treatment of the moral ideas’ covered in the rest of the book (MML, p. 232). The core of his philosophical writings, notably *Ethical Relativity* (1932), is his critique of moral objectivism. By this he meant ethical theories which assume that moral truths are discernible through reason, or some other human faculty, and exist independently of human emotions. The overarching theme of the book is the attempt to demonstrate the emotional background of normative ethical systems.

Westermarck had direct successors mainly in Finland, where a circle of scholars followed – though with differing emphases – his theoretical and methodological approaches. With their universalist and psychological emphases, Westermarck’s disciples shared an interest in global comparisons and the ‘origins’ or causes of social phenomena such as religion, art, social inequality, warfare, diplomacy and human migration (Hirn, 1900; Karsten, 1905, 1935; Landtman, 1905, 1909, 1938; Holsti, 1913; Numelin, 1937, 1950). Many of them published their main works in Britain. In the 1910s and 1920s, Gunnar Landtman, Rafael Karsten and Hilma Granqvist were also involved in ‘the intensive study of limited areas’ by conducting extensive anthropological fieldwork in Papua New Guinea, South America and Palestine (Stocking, 1979, 1992; Lindberg, 1995, 2008; Lawrence, 2010; Suolinna, 2000b). The Westermarckian school dominated Finnish sociology and

5 Lagerspetz & Suolinna (2017) provide a reappraisal of Westermarck’s major ethnographic work, the two-volume *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (1926). For Westermarck’s fieldwork, see Suolinna (2000a); Shankland (2014a); Lagerspetz (2017).

social anthropology until the Second World War, after which Westermarck's influence disappeared for more than fifty years.

The preview of the study

The portrayal of Westermarck presented here focuses primarily on the structure and logic of his ideas and work. What this means is that I try to look at Westermarck's thinking from his own perspective and with his own terms. In order to make Westermarck's views more comprehensible, I sometimes reconstruct his arguments in a more coherent form and depict them in modern terms. Because the relevant contemporary discussions close to Westermarck's interests are abundant and span various disciplines, comparisons to present concerns are limited to cases that help us to get at his views. The historical aspects of the book throw light on Westermarck's place in the history of evolutionism and, above all, his role as a continuator of David Hume's and Adam Smith's moral sentimentalism in the post-Darwinian period. Since my main focus is on what lies behind the key elements of Westermarck's moral and social theory, I am reading Hume and Smith mainly from his viewpoint. Westermarck had a polemical relation especially with Emile Durkheim, one of the most influential figures in the development of sociology and social anthropology, and I discuss their controversies to the extent that they relate to the subject matter of this study. By providing a comprehensive explication of Westermarck's moral-psychological and sociological project as a whole, I hope to lay a basis for a more extensive reappraisal of his legacy and historical and current relevance.

Besides Westermarck's writings published throughout his career, I draw extensively on unpublished lecture manuscripts and notes taken down by his students in Finland and London. The most important of these are his lectures on the history of British moral philosophy, psychology and sociology. Most of these materials have been underexplored in the previous scholarship, and many of them have not been examined at all. While it is clear that Westermarck's books and articles represent his final word on the topics that he discusses, unpublished materials and student notes are valuable aids in clarifying his ideas and concepts, even the most basic ones.

Chapter 1 discusses Westermarck's view of the relationship between ethics and sociology and outlines the theoretical and methodological foundations of his work. Chapter 2 explores the formative phases through which Westermarck developed his theory of morality during the 1890s. First, I discuss Westermarck's earliest writings on morality that are conspicuously inspired by Darwin's *Descent of Man*, followed by an examination of Westermarck's early theory of moral judgement. Finally, I explain how Westermarck sketched the broad outlines of his complete theory on the nature of moral emotions.

Chapter 3 reconstructs the central elements of Westermarck's mature moral theory, especially with respect to moral emotions, the typical conditions in which these emotions arise, and the different psychological and social factors influencing them. The chapter shows that Westermarck's analysis attaches great importance

to sympathy, denoting feelings and emotions human beings feel as reactions to similar feelings and emotions in others. Moreover, I explain how moral rules and norms relate to his theory of moral emotions and, more broadly, how an interplay between individual and social aspects of morality figure in Westermarck's thought.

Chapters 4 and 5 continue to examine sympathy as the key element in Westermarck's moral and social theory. Chapter 4 shows that sympathy plays a key role in his account of family relationships as the evolutionary origin of human social and emotional bonds. By reconstructing Westermarck's description of the expansion of sympathy beyond biological kinship and the pair bond, I explain how sympathy relates to his theory on the origins of human society and the evolution of moral emotions. Finally, I explore Westermarck's argument about sympathy as determining the limits of moral community. Chapter 5 addresses Westermarck's sympathy-based theory on the genesis and maintenance of moral norms, illustrating its pervasive importance in his *Moral Ideas*.

Chapter 6 provides a comprehensive account of Westermarck's analysis of moral responsibility. Westermarck recognised the conceptions of responsibility as an integral part of everyday social life, studying the related regularities in the framework of his theory of moral emotions. He was also very interested in how these attitudes come to be reflected in criminal legislation. The chapter analyses responsibility as an illustrative example of Westermarck's general sociological approach, his attempt to make visible the emotional background of social phenomena and institutions.

Chapter 7 examines Westermarck's perspective on the beginnings and development of eighteenth-century sentimental moral philosophy. The first part of the chapter provides an overview of Westermarck's exposition and evaluation of Lord Shaftesbury's and Francis Hutcheson's accounts of the moral sense. The second part of the chapter examines Westermarck's debt to Hume. By concentrating on Westermarck's views on the merits and shortcomings of Hume's moral psychology, it is possible to clarify several issues that have direct bearing on his moral and social theory. This concerns Westermarck's understanding on the role of emotions in human action, the objectification of emotions, the nature of moral emotions and sympathy, self-evaluation, and the role of social utility in how people make moral judgements.

Chapter 8 explores Adam Smith as the main inspiration for Westermarck's theory of moral emotions. The chapter provides a comprehensive examination of Westermarck's interpretation of Smith's ethics – including the nature of Smith's moral theory, sympathy, emotional foundations of moral judgements, the impartial spectator and human conscience – and demonstrates their significance for Westermarck's theory-building. In the concluding chapter, I pull together the central parts of my portrayal of Westermarck's thought and evaluate his contemporary relevance.

1 Research programme on morality

Throughout his scholarly career, Westermarck examined moral beliefs and behaviour in many different contexts. This chapter outlines the background of his work on morality in three ways. I first discuss the nature of Westermarck's moral theory and pull together the strands of his writings on the subject. After this, I outline the main features of Westermarck's evolutionary approach and analyse his views in the context of the history of evolutionism in the social and behavioural sciences. The final section presents an overview of Westermarck's methodological thinking.

Ethics as social science

Westermarck's approach to morality is characterised by his distinction between normative and 'psychological' ethics, by which he meant what we would call descriptive ethics or moral psychology. In his view, the task of ethics is not to formulate prescriptive rules for human action but to reveal the factual regularities in the way in which human beings make moral judgements. Ethics as a descriptive and explanatory enterprise studies 'the origin and nature of moral consciousness', both in its universal and its particular aspects (Westermarck, [1896] 2003, pp. 45–46). In this sense, ethics is a 'psychological' and 'sociological' discipline (Westermarck, 1906b, pp. 191–192; MML, p. 218). Westermarck's writings also include questions typically examined in philosophical meta-ethics, such as the analysis of moral concepts and the truth-value of moral judgements. However, as Stroup (1981) puts it, he approached ethics primarily 'from the standpoint of a sociologist observing an empirical phenomenon' (p. 217).

Sociology is, for Westermarck, a science of social phenomena. Westermarck defines the term, first and foremost, in terms of human action. A social phenomenon is a 'mode of conduct which is related to an association of individuals'. More precisely, it is a question of 'joint acts of associates, or conduct towards an associate or associates' (Westermarck, 1906b, p. 192). To put it another way, by social phenomenon Westermarck means how people, either individually or collectively, respond and react to each other. Against the background of his theory of moral emotions, when human beings observe or hear about certain kinds of action, they sympathise with the victim and feel a desire to punish the wrongdoer. Moral disapproval can also be traced to emotional reactions of disgust, which

often are evoked by human characteristics and behaviours that do not affect other people in any way. Similarly, other modes of action arouse moral approval in the recipient and/or in others, leading them into thinking that the agent is praiseworthy. In his lectures on sociology, Westermarck elaborates that besides individual and collective behaviour, social phenomena are socially prescribed and binding rules of action.¹

Outlining the division of labour between sociology and ethics, Westermarck (1906b) suggests that their scopes overlap to the extent that ethics is ‘practically a part of sociology’. This is because ‘moral feelings and ideas’ which comprise the research subject of ethics ‘express themselves through the medium of conduct which has reference to associates’. In other words, social phenomena ‘are to a large extent expressions of feelings and ideas which form the subject matter of scientific ethics’. Psychological or scientific ethics ‘deals with the feelings and ideas underlying certain modes of conduct, whilst sociology deals with the modes of conduct which spring from those feelings and ideas’ (p. 192). Since Westermarck stresses the emotional basis of moral ideas, his ethics deals to a large extent with the role of emotions in social interaction, as well as the emotional underpinnings of moral rules and norms regulating and restraining human behaviour. As Morris Ginsberg (1961) puts it, ‘the connection between his sociology and his moral theory’ is something Westermarck ‘pursued steadily throughout his work’ (p. 181). In his lectures, Westermarck emphasises that one of the main tasks of sociology is to study how emotions manifest themselves in human social action and interaction.²

What distinguishes Westermarck from the canonised founders of sociology is that he was not concerned with the study of modern industrial societies or the social consequences of modernisation. Instead, he regarded sociology as ‘the science of social phenomena in the widest sense of the word’ (Westermarck, 1908b, p. 27). One can say that Westermarck does not provide a theory of society, but a theory of the social. In doing so, he deals mainly with social and moral phenomena that may be observed and explored in all social environments. In his view, ‘the object of sociology is to explain social phenomena, to find their causes, to show how and why they have come into existence’ (Westermarck, 1908b, pp. 24–25). Westermarck’s multidisciplinary approach shows his conviction that sociologists and anthropologists should attempt to find out the causes of social phenomena, ‘whatever the nature of those causes might have been’. Social anthropology ‘is only a branch of sociology’ which studies, in particular, ‘the cultures

1 Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 43a: University of London, Remarks referring to the enclosed outlines of a course of lectures on sociology); Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 43a: University of London, Course of forty lectures on sociology, social institutions and relationships (Economic and Political Institutions excepted); Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 43a: University of London, Syllabus for lectures on sociology).

2 Åbo Akademi University Archives: Numelin (1911–1912) (Box 44: Prof. E. A. Westermarck’s lectures on sociology), p. 2; LSE Archives: Lake Barnett (1911) (Notebook: Social institutions – Professor Westermarck, Summer Term 1911), p. 1.

of non-European peoples and particularly of those who have no written history' (Westermarck, 1936a, pp. 226, 237). Westermarck did not consider his *Moral Ideas* as an anthropological study but instead emphasised his use of anthropological facts as a foundation for his theories.³ The content of his lectures on 'Sociology', delivered in 1909 at the University of Helsinki, shows that, in his view, the core issues of the *Moral Ideas* lay at the heart of sociology as a discipline. These topics include the social regulation of human behaviour and social relationships, the origin and nature of punishment, the different forms of social sanctions, and the nature of legal relationships and institutions.⁴

By 'origin' of moral judgements, Westermarck refers not so much to their historical beginnings but to the emotional basis they continue to have at the present moment. He tends to use the terms 'origin' and 'cause' interchangeably. Thus, origins serve as reasons for why certain kinds of moral standards and practices exist. In the same way, the origin of marriage refers to the key emotions supporting and maintaining marriage and family institutions among humans. This forms the very essence of Westermarck's conception of sociology. The 'development' of morality, in turn, refers to the 'general changes' that 'the moral ideas of mankind have undergone' on the way 'from savagery and barbarism to civilisation' (ODMI II, pp. 744, 746). In his own words, he uses 'the expression "moral development" in a very simple sense, without any hint of some general evolutionary formula' implying that there is some predetermined end for this development.⁵ In his later writings, Westermarck speaks rather of the 'variability' of moral judgements. The most important of these large-scale changes in the history of morals refer to the growing influence of reflection and knowledge on moral judgements and, secondly, to the expansion of the circle of people to whom moral rules are held to apply.

In the comparative and historical parts of the *Moral Ideas*, Westermarck analyses the most important morally relevant behaviours – those that arouse moral disapproval or moral praise towards the agent – and explores how they have been regarded in different times and cultures. The vast scale of Westermarck's project is revealed in his comparisons of the similarities and differences between societies in respect of attitudes towards behaviours that 'directly concern the interests of other men'. These chapters deal with different forms of killing, bodily harm, altruism and hospitality, the treatment of women, children and the aged, slavery, theft, falsehood, honour and politeness. The second section concerns the moral evaluation of actions which affect principally the agent's own welfare. The remaining chapters deal with the permissible and prohibited forms of sexual behaviour, the treatment of animals, attitudes and behaviours towards the dead, and, finally,

3 Westermarck's letter to George A. Macmillan on February 14, 1906 quoted in Ihanus (1999, p. 256).

4 The Central Archives of the University of Helsinki: Report on the activities of faculty members 1903–1908.

5 Westermarck (1907) (Box 82: The Moral Development. Lecture delivered on July 5, 1907 in Stockholm), p. 1. For an informative discussion of Westermarck's use of the term 'development', see Stroup (1980, pp. 41–45).

human relations with divine powers. Besides describing the variety of beliefs and customs, Westermarck seeks, above all, 'to discover the principle which lies at the bottom of the moral judgement in each particular case' (ODMI, pp. 327–328).

In *Ethical Relativity*, Westermarck develops his arguments regarding ethical subjectivism sketched in the first chapter of the *Moral Ideas* and presents in an abridged form the outlines of his theory of morality. At the same time, his goal is to show that normative ethical theories such as Kantianism and utilitarianism rest on the same emotions of moral approval and disapproval that provide the basis for his theory of moral judgement. Westermarck's last major work, *Christianity and Morals* (1939), examines the influence of Christianity on moral standards in Western history, and illustrates how essential Christian moral teachings can be analysed in the framework of his theory of moral emotions.

The study of morality is also at the heart of Westermarck's works on marriage and sexuality. Although Westermarck is surprisingly silent about his moral theory in the three-volume version of *The History of Human Marriage*, these themes are closely related to his broader account of morality. This is because social customs regulating marriage and sexual behaviour are morally structured, meaning that their breach arouses moral disapproval that is typically shared in a society or social group, and these are the emotions analysed in Westermarck's moral theory as moral emotions. Similarly, although Westermarck's moral theory is completely out of sight in his ethnographic works, his analysis of the multifaceted relationship between moral emotions and social customs provides the wider framework for these issues also. Westermarck made his first trip to Morocco with the intention of acquiring first-hand ethnographic data for the *Moral Ideas* he was working on (ODMI, p. v; Westermarck, 1926a, p. v). The influence of Westermarck's own fieldwork is evident especially in the parts dealing with the relationship between religion and moral judgements.

The nature of Westermarck's evolutionism

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the nascent social sciences were dominated by doctrines of social and cultural evolution, which were inspired by the French and Scottish Enlightenment's stage-theories of human social development (Stocking, 1987; Kuper, 1988; Sanderson, 2007). The emergence of evolutionism in anthropology and early sociology took place simultaneously with, and backed up by, Darwin's theory of biological evolution and common descent. The so-called classical evolutionists were united by their interest in the 'origins' of human institutions such as law, morality, marriage and religion, along with their 'development' from primitive existence through various intermediate stages to Western civilisation.

In the study of evolutionary ethics, Westermarck was preceded, for example, by C. S. Wake's (1878) *The Evolution of Morality: Being a History of the Development of Moral Culture*, Charles Letourneau's (1887) *L'évolution de la morale*, Alexander Sutherland's (1898) *The Origin and Growth of the Moral Instinct*, and his colleague at LSE, L. T. Hobhouse's (1906) *Morals in Evolution: A Study in*

Comparative Ethics. Westermarck was familiar with these works, but they did not have substantial influence on his endeavours.⁶ In his study of morals, Westermarck's links to sociocultural evolutionism are reflected, above all, in his description of the development of moral beliefs. The comparative and historical parts of the *Moral Ideas* are also structured around the evolutionary categories of savagery, barbarism and civilisation – including lower and higher levels within each of these developmental stages – whose criteria of classification Westermarck never clarifies (Ginsberg, 1961, p. 211).

However, Westermarck's main interest was in the theory of *biological evolution* applied to human emotions and sociality. Rather than developing a theory of sociocultural evolution, 'Westermarck was much more interested in using a Darwinian approach to understand human nature and its reflection in a wide range of social arrangements, marriage and family patterns, and moral consciousness in particular' (Sanderson, 2007, p. 94). These Darwinian and psychological emphases set Westermarck apart from the nineteenth-century evolutionists who quickly adopted Darwin's concept of common descent but remained largely uninfluenced by his theory of natural selection (Burrow, 1966; Bowler, 1988; Kuper, 1997). Another key difference is that Westermarck rejected, from his earliest writings, the assumption that all societies and cultures pass through the same evolutionary stages towards Western civilisation (Stroup, 1984, p. 586; Ihanus, 1999, p. 292). As he puts it, '[n]early fifty years ago I strongly opposed theories of this sort and, generally, the belief in a unilinear sequence of institutional stages' that 'were subsequently contested by Boas and other anthropologists' (Westermarck, 1936a, p. 236).

In addition to its psychological nature, Westermarck's evolutionism is characterised by the fact that he nowhere employs biological organismic analogies to analyse society or social institutions. Rather, the 'biological-sociological' view of society as an organism has been detrimental to the development of sociology (Westermarck, 1897a, p. 127; see also Westermarck, 1936a, p. 239). This is one of the key points that distinguish Westermarck from the functionalist tradition in sociology and social anthropology.⁷ What Westermarck says in the following applies to his evolutionary approach in general: 'There is no question here of biological analogies applied to the explanation of social evolution – as has been mistakenly said – but we are concerned with biological facts underlying psychical and social phenomena' (HHM I, p. 22).

Finally, unlike most of his contemporary biologists and social scientists, Westermarck understood already at the end of the 1880s that Lamarckian assumptions about the inheritance of acquired characteristics are probably false (MML, p. 78; Westermarck, 1891b, pp. 220–224, 236–240).⁸ Westermarck's early adoption of

6 Westermarck (2011), letter to Rolf Lagerborg April 7, 1900.

7 On widespread biological analogies in the history of sociology and anthropology, see Levine (1994); Hejl (1995); Haines (2011).

8 For an exhaustive discussion on Lamarckism in biology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Bowler (1983). Stocking (1982) provides an account of widespread Lamarckism in early twentieth century anthropological and social thought.

the evolutionary biologist August Weismann's modern 'neo-Darwinian' version of Darwin's evolutionary theory was essential for the biological foundation of his theory-building. It is based on the idea that natural selection, operating on variations in heritable characteristics correlated with reproductive success, is sufficient to explain biological evolution and the appearance of design in living organisms. In doing so, Weismann cut ties with the Lamarckian notions that had still been, to some extent, present in Darwin's thinking. Due to Westermarck's Darwinian reasoning and clear-cut rejection of Lamarckism, *The History of Human Marriage* has been called 'the first orthodox application of modern evolutionary theory in anthropology' (Kuper, 1988, p. 108).

'Darwinism' refers for Westermarck specifically to the idea of natural selection as the mechanism for evolutionary change, because the idea that all organisms are descended from a common ancestor was already presented before Darwin. Westermarck (1891b) regarded the basic principles of natural selection as 'extremely simple' (p. 220), providing 'an explanation of the appearance of purpose in organic life without calling in the aid of the hypothesis of a providence' (MML, p. 79). First, there is always variation among individuals of the same species. Second, the reproductive potential of organisms is much greater than the number of individuals which actually grow, develop and reproduce. Third, all organisms are, from the beginning of their existence, interacting with and influenced by their organic and inorganic environment. Naturally occurring variation in individual characteristics affects the chances of survival and reproduction. Fourth, the most favourably equipped individuals transmit through heredity advantageous traits at least to some of their offspring. In this way, certain physical and psychological characteristics are selected in the course of many generations, and deviations from the original form can develop to the extent that they can be considered as a new species (Westermarck, 1891b pp. 220–223; 1897a, pp. 116–117). Westermarck employs evolutionary theory in this specific sense throughout his oeuvre, although its weight varies greatly in different works.

Westermarck on sexual selection

Contrary to what many commentators on Westermarck have argued, he did not reject Darwin's theory of sexual selection entirely. Darwin identified two forms of sexual selection, male combat and female choice. In his discussion of sexual selection in animals, Westermarck states that in both, the processes of selection are

carried on by individuals of the same sex; but in one these individuals, generally the males, try to drive away or kill their rivals; in the other, they seek to excite or charm those of the opposite sex, generally the females, who select the most attractive males for their partners.

(HHM, p. 240; HHM I, p. 477)

Westermarck agreed with Darwin's view of male combat, arguing that the struggle between males tends to favour greater male size and strength, as well as

various ‘weapons of offence or defence many of them possess’. But he disagreed with Darwin’s view that female mate choice could produce characteristics that are harmful for their bearers in terms of survival. It seemed unlikely that ‘certain colours, forms, ornaments, sounds, or odours’ could be favoured and spread in a population merely for their aesthetic value (HHM, pp. 240–242; HHM I, pp. 477–479). In Westermarck’s reasoning, many of the traits Darwin attributed to female choice are useful because they facilitate sexes finding one another and prevent inbreeding by attracting individuals from a distance (HHM, p. 249; HHM I, p. 488). Later on, the modern ‘good genes’ models of sexual selection have cast light on the issue, suggesting that conspicuous ornaments are ‘honest’ indicators of biological fitness and parasite resistance (Hamilton & Zuk, 1982; Breed, 2017). However, Westermarck’s view on mate choice in human evolution differs substantially from his perspective on animal behaviour.

Good-genes sexual selection theory goes back to British naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace, co-discoverer of the theory of evolution by natural selection (Cronin, 1991). Wallace was young Westermarck’s mentor and wrote an introductory note to his *History of Human Marriage*.⁹ In Wallace’s view, bright colours and other ornamental structures could arise and spread through natural selection because they are positively correlated with vigour, health and parental care. Westermarck doubted whether the correlation proposed by Wallace, ‘depending on some unknown physiological law, is so necessary that it takes place even when colour is positively disadvantageous to the species’ (HHM, p. 243; HHM I, p. 480). At the same time, unlike Wallace, Westermarck applied similar ideas to humans.¹⁰

He noted early on that sexual selection has probably ‘had some influence on the physical aspect of mankind’ (HHM, p. 277). Although perceptions of physical attractiveness ‘vary greatly’ across cultures and individuals, certain basic attractiveness judgements seem ‘fundamentally similar throughout the world’ (HHM II, p. 5). In Westermarck’s view,

The full and healthy development of those visible properties which are essential to the human organism may be assumed to be universally recognised as indispensable to perfect beauty – physical deformity, an unsymmetrical shape of the body, apparent traces of disease or old age, being regarded as infavourable to personal appearance.

(HHM II, p. 5; also HHM, p. 259)

What Westermarck proposes is that general male and female preferences have an evolutionary basis because certain physical characteristics are indicators of health and reproductive potential (HHM II, pp. 3–4, 14). He suggests that the

⁹ For the correspondence between Wallace and Westermarck, see Wikman (1940).

¹⁰ The following section is indebted to Rainer Rosengren’s and Jukka-Pekka Takala’s excellent but unfortunately unpublished paper ‘Edward Westermarck’s Evolutionary Approach’. I thank Takala for access to the article.

evolution of mental characteristics may have also been moulded by the choice of mates, since 'emotional, moral, and intellectual qualities may, by evoking affection, approbation, or admiration, indirectly act as sexual stimulants' (HHM II, p. 23). However, Westermarck applied his theory of mate choice only to humans, and the reason for this may be that the characteristics humans seem to find attractive do not have similar harmful effects on their bearers as animal ornaments (Rosengren & Takala n.d., MS, p. 19).

Evolutionary sociologist and anthropologist in twentieth century perspective

Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage* proved to be a great success and was quickly translated into several languages, including French, German, Italian and Japanese. After the publication of his second book, the *Moral Ideas*, Westermarck's fame as a sociologist and anthropologist was at its peak. The book received much attention (Lagerborg, 1953; Stroup, 1982a; Roos, 2008), and Westermarck received invitations to lecture at several American universities. The Department of Economics at Harvard also offered him a full professorship (MML, pp. 247–248). However, Westermarck's reputation began to decline already during the 1920s, and after the Second World War he was identified as 'one of those nineteenth century evolutionists, whose work was no longer of interest to anybody' (Pipping, 1984, p. 317).

There is hardly any doubt that Westermarck's eclipse is linked to the broader decline of evolutionary theories of mind and behaviour in the twentieth-century social sciences (Degler, 1991; Richards, 1987). During the early decades of the century, theoretical approaches emphasising the divide between psychological and sociological explanations, on the one hand, and the social and cultural determination of human behaviour, on the other, diffused in the sphere of social sciences and psychology. British social anthropologists increasingly embraced Emile Durkheim's doctrine of 'social facts', emphasising that 'any explanation of a particular sociological phenomenon in terms of psychology, i.e. of processes of individual mental activity, is invalid' (Radcliffe-Brown, [1931] 1958, p. 64). Accordingly, the structural functionalism of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown tried to explain customs and institutions by their contributions to the social system of which they are a part. As is well known, Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown had a major influence on the American sociology which spread to Europe after the Second World War. Malinowski's version of functionalism emphasised the importance of the individual and was more open to psychology and biology, arguably reflecting Westermarck's influence. In any case, functionalist anthropology was united by an interest in the interrelations of customs, beliefs and institutions within one social community and, above all, by the idea that societies should be studied as integrated wholes.

In the United States, Franz Boas and his followers began to emphasise the importance of culture and the unique historical development of each society in shaping human psychology and social behaviour. The main target of Boasian

anthropology was the notion of unilineal cultural evolution and the racial and biological explanations of cultural differences. But at the same time, '[n]o one could provide [Boas] the proof that similar cultural practices of different societies could be produced by a common biological cause' (Richards, 1987, p. 510). Similarly, as anthropologist Arthur Wolf (1995) argues, the near universal rejection of Westermarck's theory of incest avoidance shows that anthropologists increasingly adopted the Freudian view of the dichotomous relationship between nature and culture (or society). What became 'the orthodox anthropological view' was that the seemingly universal rules, such as the incest taboo, are conventions that exist to *repress* our primal passions and inclinations. In Westermarck's alternative view, these rules rather exist as an *expression* of human emotional constitution (pp. 13–19).¹¹ I will return to this topic in Chapter 5.

Finally, there is the rise and dominance of behaviourism between the 1920s and 1960s. Westermarck's evolutionism was not the kind of instinct psychology that preceded behaviourism in the early decades of the century (Ihanus, 1999, p. 51). During this time, psychologists and social scientists enumerated a variety of instincts, which were then invoked as explanations for nearly any patterns of behaviour (Krantz & Allen, 1967; Cravens & Burnham, 1971; Boakes, 2008). However, as psychologists abandoned the idea of evolved behavioural predispositions in favour of learning and social conditioning, the Westermarckian view of universal human emotions also began to appear outdated.

After the rise of sociobiology – emerging from the work of evolutionary biologists William Hamilton, George Williams, Robert Trivers, John Maynard Smith and others in the 1960s and 1970s – there has been some confusion surrounding one important aspect of Westermarck's evolutionary approach.¹² As Trivers points out, Darwin was generally 'clear on the idea that natural selection favors traits that benefit the individual possessing them but that are not necessarily beneficial to the larger groups, such as the species itself'. At least until the late 1960s, however, it was common for biologists to reason in terms of 'the species-advantage view', assuming that 'selection has operated at a higher level than the individual, that is, at the level of the group or species, favoring traits that allow these larger units to survive' (Trivers, 1985, pp. 67–68).¹³ Since the emergence of sociobiology and the individual- or gene-centred view of evolution, the appraisals of Westermarck's

11 For Westermarck's extensive critique of Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, see Westermarck (1934).

12 Sociobiology is broadly defined as the comparative study of the evolutionary and biological bases of social behaviour in animals and humans. While most sociologists and anthropologists remain critical of the field, it has had a profound influence on the study of animal behaviour and biological anthropology (Hrdy et al. 1996; Segerstråle, 2000). There are, broadly speaking, three main contemporary evolutionary approaches to human behaviour: evolutionary psychology, human behavioural ecology and gene-culture co-evolutionary theory (Laland & Brown, 2011; Smith, 2000).

13 For the history of the group selection in biology, see Borrello (2010). For excellent reviews of the present-day debates on this issue, see West, Griffin, & Gardner (2007, 2008); West, El Mouden, & Gardner (2011).

evolutionism have been mixed. Badcock (1994) claims that ‘far from being a Darwinian in a modern sense’, Westermarck was a ‘self-evidently group selectionist’ who ‘rejected Darwin’s individualistic view of natural selection because it did not seem to serve the interests of the species’ (p. 148). For Salter (2000), ‘[t]he main shortcoming of Westermarck’s evolutionary theory is his assumption that selection occurs at the level of whole species, which is now rejected by most evolutionary theorists in favour of selection at the level of individuals (or genes)’ (p. 14). Others have claimed that even Westermarck’s theory of incest avoidance is based on a ‘classical group selectionist argument’ (Stepher, 1983, p. 47).

Then again, van den Berghe (1991) emphasises that where most of the early evolutionists in social science ‘adhered to questionable notions of group selection and to misleading and fallacious organismic analogies’, a few others, notably Westermarck, ‘were remarkably modern in their thinking’ (p. 274). Similarly, for Rotkirch (2008), Westermarck ‘did not advance explanations on a species level’ (p. 47). According to Sanderson (2012), Westermarck ‘was the very first person that we could call a sociobiologist or an evolutionary psychologist, because he was applying Darwinian natural selectionist thinking in essentially the same way as do modern-day evolutionary psychologists’ (pp. 177–178). On the other hand, Sanderson (2017, p. 71) also regards Westermarck’s species-advantage view as a flaw in his thinking.

Much of this divergence of views stems from the fact that Westermarck’s language regarding Darwinian evolutionary theory is often vague. In many places, he speaks of emotions and related behaviours serving the benefits for the species. However, as David Haig (1999) remarks of Westermarck’s incest theory, ‘Westermarck’s appeal to the good of the species was typical of the times, but his argument can easily be restated in terms of advantages to individuals or their genes’ (p. 84). It is essential to notice that the same holds true for the bulk of Westermarck’s evolutionary arguments. He seems to have assumed that, at some undefined ultimate level of analysis, traits that benefit the individual possessing them in terms of survival and reproduction are also indirectly useful to the species itself. However, his ideas are usually formulated in a way that they make sense in the individual selectionist framework. Moreover, as we shall see in Chapter 3, Westermarck’s theory of the evolution of ‘retributive emotions’ is explicitly cast in terms of natural selection operating at the level of individuals. This also applies to his account of the evolution of ‘moral emotions’, which are unique to humans. Perhaps the best formulation of Westermarck’s view of natural selection is provided in his lectures on psychology. In his view, the gist of Darwinism is that in all organisms, ‘physical and mental characteristics’ that are ‘advantageous in the struggle for existence are preserved in the genus thereby that individuals equipped with such traits have the greater chance to survive and reproduce compared to those individuals who are not equipped with such useful characteristics’. Since ‘[o]ffspring inherit many of the traits of their parents’, ‘these advantageous traits become thus fixed characteristics of the species’.¹⁴

14 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Psychology), p. 182.

Methodological foundations

The comparative method Westermarck employs in his works on morality and marriage is founded on the Darwinian evolutionary assumption that despite all the differences between individuals and groups, human ‘mental constitution’ is ‘essentially similar everywhere’. A comparison of behaviours and customs across cultures is possible because ‘all the different ethnic groups belong to the same animal species and therefore must present resemblances which have a deeper foundation than all differences which are the effects of the social environment’. And the only way to distinguish between what is local and particular and what is general is via comparison (HHM I, pp. 10, 17). Westermarck’s comparative approach has often been criticised for taking customs and beliefs out of their social context, and failing to analyse societies or cultural configurations as integrated wholes (Durkheim, [1907] 1979; Lowie, 1937; Mills, 1948; Pipping, 1982; Allardt, 2000; Lagerspetz, 2017). While there is much truth to this, it should be emphasised that the main features of Westermarck’s moral and social theory are not dependent on his written sources. Instead, they deal with phenomena that may be observed and explored in all social environments. In the same way, the most interesting sections in the comparative parts of the *Moral Ideas* offer general sociopsychological explanations that Westermarck assumed to possess universal validity.

When assessing Westermarck’s methodological thinking, it is important to understand that he saw comparative syntheses and locally limited ethnographies as complementary to each other (HHM I, pp. 14–18; MML, pp. 298–300; 1936a, pp. 238–239). In the comparative and historical parts of the *Moral Ideas*, Westermarck employs diverse empirical materials, including observations of everyday life and customs and laws as seen through various sources (ODMI, pp. 2, 158). When assessing the trustworthiness of anthropological materials, he stressed the importance of using mutually independent observations. Westermarck was well aware of the inaccuracy and unreliability of many of the sources that were available in his time. This is exactly why he emphasised the need for intensive anthropological fieldwork providing a more solid basis for cross-cultural syntheses. It is often claimed that this emphasis was a reaction to the rise of functionalist anthropology in the 1920s. In truth, this was in his agenda long before the comparative method became increasingly questioned. The treatment of weak points of comparative study was also part of Westermarck’s teaching at LSE.¹⁵

Westermarck (1910) highlighted early on that there were ‘no other investigations so urgently needed as monographs on some definite class of social phenomena or institutions among a certain group of related tribes’. This is because social phenomena and institutions are not ‘isolated’ phenomena but ‘largely influenced by local conditions, by the physical environment, by the circumstances in which the people in question live, by its habits and mental

15 LSE Archives: Lake Barnett (1911) (Notebook: Social institutions – Professor Westermarck, Summer Term 1911), p. 3.

characteristics'. It is obvious that such considerations 'can be properly taken into account when the investigation is confined to a single people or one ethnic unity' (pp. v–vi).¹⁶ Through his ethnographic works on Morocco, Westermarck was also contributing to the production of such knowledge. For the time being, he simply attempted to make the best use possible of whatever empirical materials were available.

In his methodological thinking, Westermarck was above all inspired by Darwin (MML, p. 77; HHM I, p. 24). In his view, Darwin's main works, autobiography and correspondence constitute an excellent methodological guide, enabling 'the step by step following of the great master's working and train of thought'.¹⁷ First and foremost, Westermarck appreciated Darwin's ability to draw generalisations and conclusions from a vast number of isolated facts and observations. He explains that Darwin always began by formulating tentative hypotheses that he tried to control by a diligent study of facts and observations. Then, within the process, he rejected the hypotheses that proved to be unsatisfactory and formulated new ones. Most importantly, Darwin *doubted* his assumptions from the outset and strove to find facts and explanations that opposed them. For this reason, when Darwin published his conclusions they evoked very few objections that he had not thought of beforehand.¹⁸ This entails a deliberate struggle against self-deception. The fundamental lesson Westermarck learned from Darwin was always to devote 'special attention to the facts that seemed at variance with [the] general results' (MML, p. 77).

Second, Westermarck greatly valued Darwin's view that the greatest danger in scientific inquiry is not incorrect theories but counting on incorrect facts (MML, p. 77). As Darwin puts it, false facts 'often long endure', whereas 'false views, if supported by some evidence, do little harm, for everyone takes a salutary pleasure in proving their falseness; and when this is done, one path towards error is closed and the road to truth is often at the same time opened' (Darwin, [1871] 1981, p. 385). Since Darwin stressed the importance of finding contradictory evidence and that the refuting of theories contributes to the advancement of science, his views bear a resemblance to principles later promoted by Karl Popper (Ghiselin, 1969; Ayala, 2009). This is true also for Westermarck, who emphasises how strikingly Darwin's 'scientific intellect' differs from Herbert Spencer, 'who is always on the hunt for facts that confirm his theories and shuts his eyes for everything

16 See also ODMI, p. 2; Westermarck (1908b, p. 27); HHM I, p. 15, MML, pp. 298–299; Westermarck (1936a, p. 238).

17 Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 80: Lectures. Lamarck, Darwin), pp. 17–18. Westermarck's discussion of Darwin's method was part of his lectures on the history of evolutionary thought when teaching philosophy at the University of Helsinki in the mid-1890s and after the turn of the century (Central Archives of the University of Helsinki: Untitled report of lectures for the Department of History and Philology in May 1897).

18 Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 80: Lectures. Lamarck, Darwin), pp. 17–18; Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 78: Lectures. Fragmentary pages on Darwin's theory of selection), p. 19. Here, Westermarck's account paraphrases Darwin ([1887] 1958, pp. 123, 139–141).

that speaks against them'.¹⁹ Westermarck was especially attracted to the 'clearness and a sense of reality' that he found in the tradition of British empiricism and moral sentimentalism. These features in philosophical and scientific inquiry enable refutation and further advancement, because 'even if its hypotheses were not unfailingly true, in every case it seemed possible that they could be corrected by a deeper search into the facts of experience' (MML, p. 30).

Third, Darwin's method embodies an exemplary balance between inductive and deductive reasoning. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection 'is a deduction, it is a conclusion which no direct experience can verify, but this deduction is based on the thorough study of facts, to the widest induction'.²⁰ In his autobiography, however, Darwin claimed that he followed 'true Baconian [inductive] principles, and without any theory collected facts on a wholesale scale'. On the other hand, he admitted that 'I cannot resist forming [hypotheses] on every subject' (Darwin, [1887] 1958, pp. 119–120, 141). And his letters declared that 'all observation must be for or against some view if it is to be of any service!'; 'let theory guide your observations, but till your reputation is well established be sparing in publishing theory. It makes persons doubt your observations' (Darwin, 1861 & 1863, quoted in Bonner & May, 1981, p. xiii). With his emphasis on the combination of inductive and deductive reasoning, Westermarck indicates that researchers always need some kind of a hypothesis, more or less explicated, to guide their work.

Like Darwin, Westermarck supports his conclusions with massive citing of data. 'It is only by comparing a large number of facts', he says, 'that we may hope to find the cause or causes on which a social phenomenon is dependent' (HHM, p. 4). In many places, Westermarck also emphasises the inductive nature of his theory formation. It is solely through the 'troublesome process of minute induction' that sociologists can avoid making groundless generalisations, 'building castles in the air' (Westermarck, 1908b, pp. 26–27). Related to this, Westermarck points out that the 'long enumerations of facts' found in his books 'are not meant merely to illustrate some particular theory of the author – as has been alleged by certain critics – but they form the basis on which the theory is built' (HHM I, p. 24). What is particularly relevant to our subject is that Westermarck describes also his theory of moral psychology in the making as the result of the 'inductive study of the actual conceptions of right and wrong' (Westermarck, [1896] 2003, p. 45).

In reality, at least regarding the outlines of his moral theory, Westermarck was paying the same kind of lip service to straight induction as Darwin. Ronald Fletcher (1971) rightly emphasises that in the *Moral Ideas*, 'Westermarck was not undertaking a comparative study only to establish empirical generalizations'. In addition, he attempted to explain these social regularities 'by deductions and

19 Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 78: Lectures. Fragmentary pages on Darwin's theory of selection), p. 19.

20 Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 78: Lectures. Fragmentary pages on Darwin's theory of selection), p. 19.
For Darwin's methodological pluralism, see Mayr (1991, pp. 10, 105).

hypotheses drawn from his knowledge of human psychology, which, in its turn was rooted in biological evolution' (p. 102). It is also apparent that Westermarck's growing familiarity with Hume's and Smith's work guided the shaping of his overall views. When this background is combined with the admiration of Darwin's methodological principles that Westermarck had developed already in the late 1880s (MML, p. 77), we may assume that the formation of his moral theory was grounded on the interplay between tentative hypotheses and the review of all sorts of empirical evidence and data.

This procedure is well illustrated by Westermarck's understanding of the invention of hypotheses. In his view, the process usually begins with the setting of a tentative hypothesis based on the available facts. Scientific inquiry consists of 'confirming or, if possible, refuting the hypothesis'. If the new observations or results are not consistent with the initial hypothesis, the researcher 'rejects it and formulates a new hypothesis which now becomes the clue guiding his further studies'. In this way, the research process goes on until the researcher succeeds in formulating a theory that accounts for all the known facts. Westermarck emphasises that because the hypotheses and theories are usually based on insufficient facts, one actually relies on 'a guess of inductions', that is, on 'incomplete inductive reasoning'.²¹ In stressing the combination of induction and deduction, and, above all, hypotheses as clues that guide the making and interpretation of observations (reformed or abandoned when necessary), Westermarck comes close to American pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce's abductive inference, which is sometimes called reasoning to the best explanation.

21 Westermarck (1915) (Box 80: Lectures. Psychology II), pp. 170–171.

2 The evolution of Westermarck's theory of moral emotions

Westermarck's memoirs reveal that he had decided to write a work addressing the 'origin and development of the moral consciousness' already before *The History of Human Marriage* (1891) was completed (MML, p. 100). From the very start, the gist of Westermarck's position was that '[o]ur notions of morality are closely connected with the instinctive feelings engraved in our nature' (HHM, p. 280). However, it took some time before he was able to formulate a satisfactory theory of the nature of these emotions. While marriage was a well-defined subject for Westermarck, he ponders on how 'morality extends into infinity'. Accordingly, '[i]t took a full five years before my ideas of the nature of the moral emotions had become more or less settled'. After that, it took ten more years before the work was finally published (MML, p. 102). This indicates a time frame of some fifteen years in the course of which Westermarck started working on the topic in 1890, proceeded to develop his own theory in 1892 and reached the phase of elaboration and literary composition during 1897.¹ The first part of the *Moral Ideas*, where Westermarck presents his theoretical conclusions, was completed in late 1903 (MML, pp. 196–197), and the book finally appeared in two volumes in 1906 and 1908.

The present chapter explores Westermarck's theory of moral emotions by tracing and analysing the phases of its development, both its continuities and discontinuities. The three parts of the discussion proceed in chronological order. First, I discuss Darwin's account of the evolution of morality, which marks the beginnings of Westermarck's interest in the subject. Westermarck follows Darwin's theory of morality, structured around his account of the social instincts and the moral sense, from the late 1880s to the early years of the 1890s. Then, I look at the five-year formative period to which Westermarck points in his autobiography, when he departs from Darwin's moral sense theory and formulates his early theory of moral judgement. Lastly, I examine how Westermarck frames the first outlines of his mature conceptions during 1897, finally published in 1906. After that, Westermarck's account of moral emotions underwent only minor stylistic improvements

¹ Westermarck (1897) (Box 42a: Academica, work papers, To the University Senate, application for Hermann Rosenberg grant), pp. 1, 4.

and occurs in nearly identical forms and even identical phrasings throughout his writings. In other respects, too, after the publication of the *Moral Ideas*, all the main features of Westermarck's theory of morality remain unchanged.

Darwin leading the way

Westermarck's earliest contribution to debates on ethics is his lecture in 1889, 'The theory of selection and its importance for the physical, mental and social sciences', delivered to the members of a student society at the University of Helsinki (Westermarck, 1891b). A year later he set forth his views in a lecture, 'Darwin's hypothesis concerning the origin of the moral sense', at the meeting of the Philosophical Society of Finland (Westermarck, 1890). Westermarck's nascent interest in the sources of morality was conspicuously inspired by Darwin's *Descent of Man* and his theory of the moral sense. It is found, Westermarck (1891b) submits, 'in one of the most ingenious chapters [Darwin] has ever written' (p. 231). Westermarck begins his account of morality by juxtaposing how people generally judge acts as morally wrong with the moral condemnation of incest. Where incest is considered wrong because 'such relationships contradict our natural instincts', Westermarck suggests that the same seems to apply also to 'other acts that we call immoral'. These kinds of actions contradict our social instincts, and thus the foundation of morality according to Darwin's evolutionary account (Westermarck, 1891b, pp. 231–232).²

Darwin on social instincts and the moral sense

In *Descent of Man* Darwin ([1871] 1981) attempts to demonstrate that the mental and behavioural differences between humans and animals are differences in degree rather than in kind. Humans and other animals possess 'similar passions, affections, and emotions' as well as similar mental abilities, 'though in very different degrees' (pp. 48–49). These common features include the social instincts. Darwin links to social instincts (1) the pleasure social animals take in each other's company; (2) the tendency to feel sympathy by which he meant the capacity to share and be affected by the feelings of others and (3) the altruistic disposition to perform various services for individuals of the same group. In humans, the social instincts also include (4) the strong desire to gain the approval of others and avoid their disapproval (Darwin, [1871] 1981, pp. 71–72, 85–86; Krebs, 2011, p. 41). These four characteristic features are particularly bound up with sympathy, which Darwin regards as the foundation stone of social instincts.³

2 The English translation of Westermarck's (1891b) lecture has been published in Shankland (2014c).

3 For more on Darwin's view on sympathy, see Richards (1987, pp. 208–210); Krebs (2011, pp. 41–44); White (2013).

Darwin conceives the social instincts as behavioural dispositions developed and spread through natural selection. In species in which group living has promoted survival and reproduction, individuals who enjoy the company of others and respond to their emotions have best avoided different dangers. More solitary individuals, on the other hand, are left without the community protection, which exposes them more easily to various threats (Darwin, [1871] 1981, p. 80). Darwin's knowledge of social animals and especially the primates enabled him to reconstruct the social life of early humans. Early modern humans had 'instinctive love and sympathy' for other members of the social group, which manifested themselves in mutual aid and other forms of cooperation (Darwin, [1871] 1981, pp. 84–86, 161–162). Man, endowed with the social instincts, is 'influenced in the highest degree by the wishes, approbation and blame of his fellow-men, as expressed by their gestures and language'. 'Even when we are quite alone', Darwin continues, 'how often do we think with pleasure or pain of what others think of us, – of their imagined approbation or disapprobation; and this all follows from sympathy' (Darwin, [1874] 2004, pp. 133, 136). Westermarck summarises Darwin's fundamentally emotional and social conception of human nature by stating that 'human beings possess innately instinctive love and sympathy for their companions; even the most barbarous savage is helpful and loyal to one's tribe-people'. He endorses Darwin's view that 'social instincts have been acquired through natural selection' because they have survival value for animals, including humans, which benefit from group living. Finally, and most importantly, Westermarck believes that 'from these social instincts arise many of the actions we call moral' (Westermarck, 1891b, p. 232).

While arguing for the continuity between animal and human psychology, Darwin ([1871] 1981) regards 'the moral sense or conscience' as the most important uniquely human feature (p. 70). By grounding his moral theory in moral sense and sympathy, Darwin was continuing the legacy of the eighteenth-century British moral sentimentalism (Dixon 2008; Ruse, 2008; White, 2013). He conceives the moral sense as a natural extension of animal social instincts. Although Darwin and most of his later commentators often write vaguely about 'the moral sense or conscience', Darwin also distinguishes between these two. He refers to 'the moral sense, which tells us what we ought to do' and, on the other hand, to 'the conscience which reproves us if we disobey it' (Darwin, [1871] 1981, p. 93). This distinction is endorsed by Westermarck's presentation of Darwin's theory, distinguishing between *moral sense* and *remorse*. In Westermarck's (1891b) view, 'remorse generally constitutes a criterion that shows that our moral sense has been offended' (p. 233).

Young Westermarck (1891b) was particularly impressed by Darwin's attempt to demonstrate 'how even the moral sense could be explained by the theory of selection' (p. 231). Darwin describes the moral sense as 'the deep feeling of right or duty' which prompts altruistic acts. He assumes that dispositions towards altruistic behaviour, which is costly to the agent but beneficial to the recipient or recipients, could arise because, in some special cases, natural selection acted on groups or communities rather than individuals. While in many cases 'a high

standard of morality' would be costly to the individual in terms of survival and reproduction, the increase of moral traits within the group would 'certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over the other'. Thus, tribes consisting of individuals endowed with the readiness 'to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection' (Darwin, [1871] 1981, pp. 70, 163, 166). However, as we shall see in Chapter 4, Westermarck provided later on a radically different description of the evolution of altruistic behaviour.

The workings of conscience

Besides the idea of the moral sense, Westermarck (1890) placed great value on Darwin's theory of conscience. Darwin proposes a four-part explanation for the evolution of conscience, of which Westermarck highlights the first two, the social instincts and the increased cognitive capacities, which are associated with the ability to remember one's past actions and to reflect on them afterwards by comparing self-regarding actions with other-regarding alternatives.⁴ Westermarck quotes Darwin to sum up the question of the moral sense and conscience:

Why should a man feel that he ought to obey one instinctive desire rather than another? Why does he bitterly regret if he has yielded to the strong sense of self-preservation, and has not risked his life to save that of a fellow-creature; or why does he regret having stolen food from severe hunger?

(Darwin, [1871] 1981, p. 87; Westermarck, 1891b, p. 232)

The answer, Westermarck submits, is found in the conflict between different instincts and especially in the variations in their mental manifestation. What determines the workings of conscience is that the social instincts are more enduring than other kinds of instincts. Although the social instincts are 'ever present and persistent' in human nature, Darwin suggests that we are often moved by more selfish urges such as the instinct of self-preservation, lust, or the desire for vengeance. These selfish impulses are transient by nature and, once satisfied, they lose their motivational power (Westermarck, 1891b, p. 232; Darwin, [1871] 1981, pp. 89–90). However, as increased intelligence improves memory

4 In addition to social instincts and intelligence, Darwin argues that the moral sense and conscience are further moulded by the acquisition of language, resulting in the increasing receptivity to the common opinion about what constitutes right and wrong. Moreover, these emotional tendencies are strongly influenced by habit and social learning. To sum up, instead of being a simple gut feeling, '[u]ltimately a highly complex sentiment, having its first origin in the social instincts, largely guided by the approbation of our fellow-men, ruled by reason, self-interest, and in later times by deep religious feelings, confirmed by instruction and habit, all combined, constitute our moral sense or conscience' (Darwin, [1871] 1981, pp. 165–166). For more detailed accounts of Darwin's four-part theory of the moral sense and conscience, see Richards (1987, pp. 207–219); Dixon (2008, chapter 4); Krebs (2011, chapter 4).

and imagination, images of past actions come constantly to the subject's mind. Because of this, Westermarck quotes Darwin's solution:

He will be compelled to compare the weaker impressions of, for instance, past hunger, or of vengeance satisfied or danger avoided at the cost of other men, with the instinct of sympathy and good-will to his fellows, which is still present and ever in some degree active in his mind. He will then feel in his imagination that a stronger instinct has yielded to one which now seems comparatively weak; and then that sense of dissatisfaction will inevitably be felt with which man is endowed, like every other animal, in order that his instincts may be obeyed.

(Darwin, [1871] 1981, pp. 89–90)

Westermarck continues that because the individual now feels that he or she has neglected the social instincts in the past situation, the resulting feeling of dissatisfaction makes itself manifest in the form of regret or remorse. In sum, for young Westermarck, Darwin's account of the moral sense and conscience served as a clear and indisputable example of the necessity to incorporate the evolutionary perspective into ethical inquiry (Westermarck, 1891b, p. 233).

Early theory of moral judgement

For all the impetus for the study of morality that Westermarck received from Darwin, he soon distanced himself from Darwin's reflections on the subject. During the first half of the 1890s, Westermarck served as a lecturer in sociology, and from 1894 as an acting professor of philosophy at the University of Helsinki. In connection with this, Westermarck developed his early theory of moral judgement. From this time, notes taken down by a student of Westermarck's (1894) lectures entitled 'Social Science' have survived, enabling us to explore how Westermarck's views took shape. Considering Westermarck's extensive contributions to the study of moral emotions, his early lectures on sociology are of special interest, for they reveal his first attempts to analyse moral emotions as the fundamental elements of human sociality. In 1895, Westermarck also presented his theory in the Philosophical Society of Finland talk entitled 'Moral feeling'.⁵ In connection with Westermarck's early theory of moral judgement, I use the term 'moral feelings' rather than 'moral emotions'. This is because, as we shall see in the next chapter, in his mature writings Westermarck uses the term 'feeling' to refer to the relatively simple feelings of pleasure and pain and as distinguished from 'emotion'. In his early moral theory, moral feelings are explicitly feelings of pleasure

5 Since these lectures are by and large identical, I will treat them in parallel, together with Westermarck's other addresses to the Philosophical Society of this period. For discussion of Westermarck's other activities in the Philosophical Society, see von Wright (1982); Stroup (1982a, chapter 2); Ihanus (1999, pp. 165–171).

and pain. The most significant difference with regard to his initial position was that Westermarck no longer considered the moral sense or feeling to be the motive for altruistic action, but rather he saw it as the basis of *moral judgement*.

In his early lectures, Westermarck (1894) begins his account of morality by discussing the elements that comprise the human mind. Westermarck's analysis is grounded on the tripartite classification of mind, according to which the mind comprises cognition, feeling and the will. These mental activities are analytically simple constituents, so simple 'that they cannot be defined, only classified further'. At the same time, no mental activity is exclusively cognition, feeling or conation, since these elements are inseparably interwoven. His threefold classification is an analytical distinction, since 'classification in psychology is not natural, but artificial' (pp. 32–33).⁶

Westermarck views cognitions as sensations and ideas which could be divided according to the five senses. In the Humean spirit, he classifies cognitions into 'direct sensations' and 'free ideas' that arise out of recalling sensations. Cognitions are closely related to feelings, because 'ideas are always bound up with an emotional tone'. Conation or the will, in turn, is divided into the categories of instinct, drive, intention and decision. All of these are 'impulses for action', but they differ in relation to two matters. These are, first, the extent of which the person is conscious of the end of an action, and, second, how reflectively he or she enters into performing an action. At the same time, the conative elements are not separate mental activities, and it is impossible to say into which category individual acts of will should be classed. Rejecting the traditional dichotomy between instinct and reason, Westermarck argues that conscious and reflective actions have instinctual underpinnings. Conation and cognition come hand in hand also because thinking implies directing one's attention, and attention stands for an act of will (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 33, 36–37). By emphasising the emotional input in the cognitive and volitional processes, Westermarck follows the now widespread Humean position that feelings and emotions are not a conflicting force to reason but rather the constituent making decision-making possible (Damasio 1994, 2004).

In developing his theory of moral emotions, Westermarck also applied himself to the bodily expressions of emotions and lectured on the theory of emotion William James and Carl Lange had proposed independently in the mid-1880s. As Thomas Dixon (2003) points out, the traditional model assumed that the passions and emotions of the soul acted on the body and generated bodily changes. The revolutionary element of the James-Lange theory was to reverse the direction of causation and propose that 'the bodily changes that people had been inclined to call the "expression" of an emotion were in fact the primary constituent cause of

6 Then and subsequently, Westermarck's main guide to more narrowly psychological topics was the Danish philosopher-psychologist Harald Høffding (Ihanus, 1999). Much of Westermarck's account of the mind is based on Høffding ([1882] 1896). On Høffding in the context of Darwinism, see Kjærgaard, Gregersen & Hjermitslev (2008); Hjermitslev (2010). For the history of the threefold division of mind into cognition, feeling and conation, see Hilgard (1980).

the emotion' (pp. 204–207). Accordingly, when we perceive a certain object or event, our body reflexively reacts in a certain manner, and emotions are the felt sensations of these physiological changes. Therefore, cognition does not cause emotions, but emotions are feelings of instinctive bodily response (James, 1884). Westermarck himself assigned bodily reactions a significant role in all mental activity, but added the caveat that there was not yet enough evidence to support the presumption of causality between bodily responses and emotions. As he puts it, 'I simply want to eliminate from the James-Lange hypothesis every reference to a causal relationship'. For Westermarck, feelings and emotions are inextricably linked to sensations of bodily changes, but 'we do not know if the organic sensations, that is, the sensations of the inner state of the body, exclusively determine the nature of the affects, we only know that they play an important part therein' (Westermarck, 1896, pp. 347–348, 353). Westermarck's position on this issue continues along similar lines in his mature theory of moral emotions.

The feelings of moral approval and disapproval

The starting point for Westermarck's treatment of morality is the plain fact that we continuously evaluate the actions of others in moral terms. However, when we claim or think that certain acts are right or wrong, Westermarck argues that we are not referring to the outward act itself, nor to its consequences, but to the intention behind the act. He defines intention as the will to reach a given end. What then makes us to regard some intentions as moral, or approvable, and some as immoral, or blameworthy? Westermarck begins his answer by proposing that moral judgments are based on moral feelings, which are of two kinds, moral approval and disapproval. Moral approval is a feeling of pleasure, and moral disapproval is a feeling of pain (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 37–38).

The gist of Westermarck's position at this stage of its development is that moral feelings arise from putting ourselves in the other person's place. When we observe the actions of others, we spontaneously form a 'vague idea' of how we would have acted if we were in that person's shoes. The process depends on a 'fully natural and simple association of ideas' and is analogous to the kind of nausea we are prone to feel at looking at someone eating a substance we find revolting or the dizziness we feel when seeing someone stand on the edge of a cliff (Westermarck, 1895, pp. 237–238). In modern psychological terms, Westermarck discusses cognitive empathy or perspective-taking, the capacity to understand another's situation and states of mind. This particular psychological mechanism is the source of our feelings of moral approval and moral disapproval:

The moral feeling arises when the intention of the person in action corresponds or fails to correspond with the intention I personally assume I would have if I were to be in his place. The correspondence between the ideas of intention arouses pleasure and evokes approval; the lack of correspondence evokes pain, disapproval.

(Westermarck, 1894, p. 69)

Considering the interactive psychology through which the moral feelings arise, they belong to a wider class of 'relational feelings'. The relational character implies that *moral feelings arise out of the relationship between two ideas*. First, there is our interpretation of the agent's intention, and, second, our notion of how we would have acted in the same situation (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 33, 38–39).⁷ Westermarck also clarifies what he means by putting oneself in another person's shoes. It is not that I imagine myself to be the other person, but it is to imagine 'myself with the whole of my own psychological nature' in the same situation. Hence, the moral reactions carry a subjective stamp; they 'depend on the quality of my own will'. For example, when we feel that we would have resisted a certain temptation whereas the person we observe did not, we are roused to an unpleasant state of mind and we disapprove of his or her action (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 69–70).

At the same time, Westermarck emphasises that when we express moral judgements we are only concerned with how acts stand in relation to the person's will as a whole, that is, to his or her character. As in his later works, Westermarck follows Hume in arguing that humans have a natural tendency spontaneously to evaluate whether behaviours can be regarded as true expressions of character (Westermarck, 1894, p. 70). Unless we interpret human action this way, 'social life would be impossible' (Westermarck, 1892, p. 195). To employ Westermarck's example, if we consider a theft to be strongly influenced by some nonvolitional, external circumstances with uncontrollable strength to an average human being (severe hunger or a threat, for example), we are likely to think that the agent's action does not quite reflect his or her actual character. This, in turn, is likely to mitigate our moral disapproval. Most importantly, Westermarck already at this stage settled on his final position, emphasising that in our everyday reasoning, we in general do not reflect on how someone's character *has become* such as it is. We simply take one's character as it is, and as such it is the subject of moral judgement (Westermarck, 1894, p. 70; ODMI, pp. 325–326). These discussions mark the beginnings of Westermarck's major interest in moral responsibility. Related to this, his view that the subject of moral judgement is not action, but rather intention behind the action, construed as an expression of person's character, remains constant in Westermarck's writings.

As in his earlier discussion of Darwin, Westermarck observes that people feel moral approval and disapproval also towards themselves. Instead of describing self-evaluation in terms of a conflict between selfish and social instincts, he now describes its workings via the relational nature of moral feelings. This means that we morally disapprove of our own action if we, afterwards, do not share our earlier intention (Westermarck, 1895, p. 238). Westermarck describes remorse as a self-directed moral disapproval, which arises from the lack of correspondence of

7 Westermarck's idea of relational feelings is derived from the Scottish philosopher Alexander Bain (Westermarck, 1895, p. 237) and the Danish psychologist Alfred Lehmann (Ihanus, 1999, pp. 180–181).

intentions. Correspondingly, if we assume that we still were to act in the same way if the situation should repeat itself, there is no conflict between intentions and our conscience is at ease. For Westermarck, these emotional expressions may be titled *conscience*, defined as ‘the feeling of pleasure or pain which arises when the idea of one of my previous intentions comes into relation with the nature of my will as it is now’ (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 39–40). As is the case with other-directed moral emotions, also Westermarck’s understanding of self-directed moral emotions underwent great changes by the time of his mature moral theory.

Elsewhere in his early writings, Westermarck points also at the stabilising impact the feeling of shame has on human conduct. He quotes approvingly Alexander Bain’s remark on the social nature of shame, implying that it ‘is resolved by a reference to the dread of being condemned, or ill-thought of, by others’. For Westermarck, ‘[s]uch dread is undoubtedly one of the most powerful motives of human action’ (HHM, pp. 208–209). Strangely enough, both in his lectures under discussion and later works on morality, the explicit analysis and references to shame are conspicuously absent.

The rules of morality and the general will

Since the formulation of his early theory of moral judgement, Westermarck consistently looked beyond the strictly psychological facets of moral feelings or emotions as well as the dyadic relationship between spectator and agent. He was equally interested in the social settings in which moral emotions are embedded, considering it crucial to study the influence of social context on these emotions. At the same time, he studied the manifestations of the same human emotions in different cultural settings, including their transmission in the form of moral customs and rules.

These efforts are clearly visible already in Westermarck’s early work because relationality is not the only distinctive feature of moral approval and disapproval. The 1895 lecture makes clear that the second defining characteristic of moral feelings is that the intentions we imagine ourselves to have in the agent’s place must ‘come within the sphere of recognised general rules, or the so-called moral commandments’ (Westermarck, 1895, p. 239; von Wright, 1982, pp. 43–44). In other words, our feelings of pleasure and pain are moral feelings only if our idea of how we would have acted in the same situation accords with some generally recognised moral rule. The reason why Westermarck calls this second characteristic of moral feelings ‘only of a formal type’ appears to be his consideration that we may be aroused to moral disapproval simply because the agent’s action conflicts with our personal moral conviction. Therefore, ‘moral feeling does not arise, as it is often proposed, so that the will that judges, whether it is my own or of others, stands in conflict with abstract moral rules’ (Westermarck, 1895, pp. 238–239).

One of the most neglected aspects of Westermarck’s ethics concerns his major interest on the emergence and maintenance of moral norms. His first analysis of moral rules is provided in the early lectures. The general moral precepts are expressions of ‘the general will’ (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 29, 40), or ‘the will

that is dominating in a society' (Westermarck, 1895, p. 230). His early concept of the general will suggests that the 'character of people's will is more or less uniform' (Westermarck, 1894, p. 43). Because the moral feelings are relational feelings, differences with regard to them lead to conflict: 'If a person has a separate will which departs from the general will, he is disapproved of, as a result of the feeling of pain evoked by the lack of correspondence' (Westermarck, 1895, pp. 239–240). The resulting feeling is 'the public moral feeling of pain', and this moral disapproval, which is socially shared, gives rise to general moral rules such as the prohibition against killing and theft inside the community (Westermarck, 1894, p. 41).

Importantly, for Westermarck, general moral rules have originated spontaneously. Although some moral commandments have personal initiators, they 'have in general sprung directly from the general will, without having some special person announcing them or as an originator' (Westermarck, 1895, p. 239). The fundamental moral rules found in all human societies express the similarity of human conation, that is, the fact that 'people are generally by nature equipped with social and egoistic instincts'. The Darwinian social instincts partly explain why human beings are generally reluctant to harm other members of the community and why they respond with moral disapproval when another person is hurt. In addition, we are led to the same direction by our egoistic instincts because we are likely to 'refrain from actions which may elicit revenge', that is, actions potentially harmful to ourselves (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 40–41).

The customs of society

In his discussion of Westermarck's early moral theory, Timothy Stroup (1982a) argues that even though Westermarck's concept of the general will looks very Rousseauesque, he 'arrives at the notion as a Darwinian'. According to Westermarck, Stroup says, 'the concept is simply a (perhaps unfortunate) shorthand for the fact that the continuous operation of natural selection has resulted in a large measure of emotional agreement about important issues' (pp. 67–68). However, the Darwinian reading of Westermarck's notion of the general will is not the whole story of the concept. If the rules of morality are manifestations of the general will, the concept must somehow take in also the factual diversity of moral standards. Taking this into account, Westermarck goes beyond the strictly Darwinian arguments discussed earlier. Westermarck's more inclusive view is represented in his account of the intimate connection between the general will and social customs. For young Westermarck (1894), 'custom is always an expression of the general will materialised in action'. In his view, human beings are inclined to identify the rules of custom and moral standards, since customs are 'rules for conduct laid down by the general will' (pp. 41, 43). Referring to Westermarck's mature moral theory, G. H. von Wright (1982) has rightly observed that 'the great emphasis Westermarck placed on the importance of custom [...] represents a continuation of his thinking from the time of the mid-1890s' (p. 45). In his later works, Westermarck suggests that people tend to feel their emotion-based moral judgements as

'disinterested', 'impartial' and shared by others when they are in congruence with the prevailing customs, the social setting of morality.

When discussing the connection between customs and the general will in his early lectures, Westermarck first defines habit simply as something human individuals are accustomed to do. Custom, on the other hand, 'is a habit elevated to a norm of conduct'. Customs are rooted in habits and they include a binding and regulating character, implying how one should act if one wishes to avoid social sanctions. He further notes that, for those habits that are for some reason, whatever it may be, regarded important for society, a general demand arises that they should be obeyed (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 27–30). The shift from habits to social customs is further supported by the fact that action is commonly associated with normative expectations: 'In general one could say that moral rules are based on people's will: people act in a certain way and want that others should behave similarly' (Westermarck, 1895, p. 239).⁸ He makes a similar distinction between habits and customs in his mature moral and social theory (ODMI, p. 118; ER, p. 109). There the question of how 'social habits', due to the influence of collectively shared moral emotions, give rise to 'rules of custom, or institutions' (HHM I, pp. 69–71) becomes of even more pivotal importance. In this way, while retaining the idea of biological evolution as a central background element, Westermarck's moral theory assumes a social process of institutionalisation as a crucial condition for the development of moral norms.

Key shifts towards a theory of retributive emotions

Westermarck's views developed rapidly and underwent great changes in the two years following the 1895 'Moral feeling' lecture (von Wright, 1982, p. 45). This comes up also in his correspondence where he writes, '[w]hen I was teaching my little course on social science for the first time, I had a view on the moral emotion that I now regard fundamentally incorrect'.⁹ Broadly speaking, Westermarck arrived at the outlines of his main conclusions, published finally ten years later in a more elaborated form in the first part of the *Moral Ideas*, by the spring of 1897. The first rough outlines of Westermarck's mature theory of moral emotions are set forth in his lecture 'The predicate of moral judgements', delivered in late April 1897 to the Philosophical Society. Before turning to this, it is useful to consider his lectures on psychology from the early 1897, which shed light on this crucial period in the development of his thought.

From these lectures, it becomes clear that at that time, Westermarck still adhered to the essentials of his early moral theory. However, it is his new account of the origin of moral rules that represents an important transition towards his

8 In these transitions from habits to moral norms, Westermarck (1894) places great emphasis also on supernatural beliefs and fears, especially regarding the punishment of ancestors' spirits, which have 'always proved to be a prime mover in social life' (p. 27).

9 Westermarck (2011), letter to Rolf Lagerborg October 2, 1898.

mature theory of moral emotions. Instead of tracing the source of moral rules to the general will, Westermarck emphasises explicitly, as also later on, *the spectators' sympathetic resentment* as the foundation of moral norms. Westermarck suggests that moral rules are based on such approval and disapproval which concern not only one's own interests, but also actions directed towards others. He argues that human beings have a natural tendency to think that a person who intentionally inflicts harm on another and violates a moral rule should be punished. The most important alteration in Westermarck's argumentation is that this takes place because *such actions have a tendency to arouse the emotion of resentment or revenge*. This applies both to the person wronged and the spectators who are not personally involved. Drawing conspicuously on the main concepts of Adam Smith's moral theory, he emphasises that moral rules are based upon the impartial spectator's sympathy with the resentment of the injured party. Similarly, Westermarck follows Smith in suggesting that when we consider the agent as meritorious or worthy of reward, our moral judgement is based on our sympathy with the gratitude felt by the recipient of a good deed.¹⁰

Later in the same spring, Westermarck presented his revised views on the nature of moral emotions to the Philosophical Society. In his view, moral judgements are based on moral approval and moral disapproval, but contrary to his earlier position, they are not merely passive feelings of pleasure and pain. Instead they are *reactive emotions* directed towards another person as a response to his or her action. In Westermarck's (1897b) words, 'moral disapproval is an emotion of indignation', which means that it 'is accompanied by a distinctive desire to punish'. Respectively, 'moral approval is always accompanied by the desire to reward' (p. 300). However, not all emotions of approval and disapproval are moral emotions. Here Westermarck introduces for the first time 'disinterestedness' as the descriptive characteristic by which moral emotions are distinguished from related emotions. This implies that a disapproving judgement 'does not simply mean that the person making the judgement desires to reproach or punish X [the agent], but that X *deserves to be reproached or punished*. The difference is that in the latter case, *all self-interest is excluded*'. There are also self-directed moral emotions which possess these same characteristics (Westermarck, 1897b, p. 300, emphasis added). Moreover, disinterestedness implies that we feel a desire to reward and punish also when we are not personally involved nor influenced by the action.

It was thus only during the spring of 1897 that Westermarck gave up his earlier twofold theory of moral feelings. First, he replaced the idea of relational feelings with the emerging theory of moral approval and disapproval as 'retributive emotions'. This was accomplished by combining his account of moral approval and disapproval on the one hand, and resentment and gratitude on the other, into a *single unified theory of moral emotions as retributive emotions*. By linking the moral emotions with the evolved tendencies for returning benefit for benefit and

10 The National Library of Finland: Hagelin (1897) (Notes according to Dr. E. A. Westermarck's lectures), no pagination; Puukko (1897) (Psychology of feeling), pp. 46–47.

injury for injury, Westermarck gave the tendency towards reciprocity a central position. Concerning the retributive nature of moral emotions, Westermarck declared the next year to have 'reached a degree of conviction which surely no power in heaven or on earth can weaken, at least not all the way to the ground'.¹¹ This prediction turned out to be right. Second, he replaced his early ideas of moral commandments and the general will with the feature of 'disinterestedness', soon supplemented with the descriptions of 'relative impartiality' and 'flavour of generality'. These three empirical characteristics, which found their way to the *Moral Ideas*, were presented for the first time in an article on the emotional basis of moral concepts published in *Mind* (Westermarck, 1900).

Simply put, this very heart of Westermarck's mature moral theory suggests that when the emotions of approval and disapproval are moral emotions, they are characterised by 'disinterestedness' – because they are felt as independent of any benefit to oneself; 'apparent impartiality' – because we feel that we do not favour any of the parties involved; and 'a flavour of generality' – because we assume that most other people we identify with would respond the same way in a similar situation (ODMI, pp. 101–105). Due to these characteristics, moral emotions are typically felt as justified and generalisable: we feel that almost *anyone* who would happen to be in a similar situation would respond, or at least *ought* to respond, in the same way. These self-transcending features attach to moral emotions and judgements their specifically moral character, constantly cropping up in human interaction.

Continuities in Westermarck's thought

Despite the major changes in his views, the main features of Westermarck's mature moral theory are present in nascent form already in his early work. These constant elements concern his attempt to develop a theory on the emotional basis of moral judgements. He was also early to analyse the connection between moral emotions and social customs and to develop an interest in the folk notions of responsibility. Above all, the desire for retribution as a distinctive feature of human psychology and social reality figures already in his early lectures on sociology. Here, Westermarck traces the occurrence of retribution in its many variations to the simple fact that human beings are on evolutionary grounds equipped with emotional tendencies which prompt the modes of behaviour we call revenge. In his definition, revenge, as an emotion, is the 'desire to inflict harm or pain to someone who has inflicted or wanted to inflict harm or pain to me'. Westermarck also observes that revenge in the simple form of direct and immediate retaliation is found in many animals. The feeling of revenge obviously does not always lead to the *act* of revenge, since 'this desire can in the blink of an eye be checked by other stronger feelings'. However, '*it may well be doubted that any human being would be totally free from this law of nature [. . .] that he would not feel the slightest*

11 Westermarck (2011), letter to Rolf Lagerborg October 2, 1898.

desire for revenge, if another individual inflicted him some harm' (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 46–48). Related to this, Westermarck discusses already at this point the origins of different forms of punishment in collectively shared punitive responses, thus anticipating his later and clearly more advanced contributions to the sociology, anthropology and philosophy of punishment.¹²

The crucial difference between Westermarck's early and mature positions is that in his early account of retribution, he did not yet argue for the resemblance between the emotions of revenge and moral disapproval. As he would put it later on, '[i]t is the instinctive desire to inflict counter-pain' – whether mental or physical – that gives moral indignation its most important characteristic' (ODMI, p. 92; ER, p. 85). Indeed, Westermarck's letters hint that it was especially due to his closer studies on the nature of revenge that gave him the keys to figure out the 'essence and basis of moral emotion'.¹³ Similarly, as we have seen, it was not until the early 1897 that Westermarck was arriving at his equally central notion that the emotion of moral approval is akin to gratitude.

G. H. von Wright (1982) argues that '[i]t is not possible to say at what stage Westermarck came decisively under the influence of [Adam] Smith'. Referring specifically to Westermarck's account of moral emotions, he estimates that 'the main points of Westermarck's moral philosophy were arrived at without any direct influence from Smith' (pp. 47–49). There is, however, more to add to von Wright's question. First, Smith's influence on Westermarck is apparent already in his early moral theory. His view that moral approval and disapproval arise from the process of placing oneself imaginatively in the shoes of the agent shows obvious parallel with Smith's theory of moral judgement. In his early lectures, there is also a passing reference to the Smithian concept of the impartial spectator. More importantly, there are good reasons to claim that Westermarck reached his fundamental conclusions concerning the nature of moral emotions specifically as a result of studying Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* more closely. As noted above, Westermarck's account of the spectator's sympathetic resentment and gratitude, presented in his 1897 psychology lectures, simply repeats the key arguments of Smith's theory of moral judgement. Smith's decisive role in the formation of Westermarck's views is also reflected in an application for a travel grant the same spring, where Westermarck calls Smith the most important scholar so far to have addressed the origin and nature of morality.¹⁴ After this, Westermarck seems even to have understood his endeavours partly as a matter of putting Smith's theory of moral sentiments to an empirical test. Referring to his still unfinished *Moral Ideas*, Westermarck (1900) emphasises that a 'comprehensive study of the moral

12 For Westermarck's mature account of the emergence and nature of the institutions of punishment, see ODMI, pp. 168–201. In *Ethical Relativity*, Westermarck defends his descriptive retribution theory against various philosophical doctrines of punishment. John Mackie (1982) provides a philosophical defence of Westermarck's position.

13 Westermarck (2011), letter to Rolf Lagerborg October 2, 1898.

14 Westermarck (1897) (Box 42a: Academica, work papers, To the University Senate, application for Hermann Rosenberg grant), p. 2.

ideas of various nations and in various ages confirms the ingenious hypothesis set forth by Adam Smith, that resentment and gratitude belong to the root-principles of the moral consciousness' (p. 185).

As to other continuities, Westermarck points already in the same sociology lectures, albeit only in passing, to the impartial nature of moral feelings. Although an explicit account of impartiality would emerge in his moral theorising only several years later, Westermarck (1894) settled early on his final view that revenge, properly speaking, is a feeling or emotion which more directly concerns one's private interests, whereas 'moral feeling is an impartial feeling'. However, Westermarck is not far from his mature position when he observes that we may likewise feel the desire for retribution when we, as spectators, only observe someone hurting or aiming to hurt someone else (pp. 46–48). From 1897 onwards, Westermarck began to emphasise this kind of sympathetic response as the core of his theory of moral emotions. What follows is that besides responding morally to actions directed towards ourselves, we respond morally to how other people are treated. At the heart of Westermarck's scholarly interests lies the study of the classes of acts that cause us to feel hostile towards a person even though we are not personally at the receiving ends of those acts. The following chapters explore the different ways that the retributive nature of moral emotions 'at once throws light on many of the otherwise dark corners of the moral consciousness'.¹⁵

15 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 83.

3 Westermarck's mature account of morality

The gist of Westermarck's moral theory is the view that human moral judgements are ultimately based on emotions that he calls moral emotions. This chapter presents a comprehensive account of Westermarck's theory of moral emotions, the main focus being on its psychological and social elements. I begin by examining Westermarck's view of 'retributive emotions', through which he locates the origins of morality in emotional reactions and, further, in the more rudimentary behavioural patterns humans share with the widest possible range of other animal species. Next, I look at his analysis of the characteristics by which the moral emotions are distinguished from other retributive emotions. This is closely related to the endeavour to identify and explore the typical conditions in which the moral emotions arise. These concern, first, Westermarck's examination of sympathy and other forms of emotional contagion, second, the emotional reactions of liking and disliking, and third, the connection between the moral emotions and social customs. Third, I outline Westermarck's understanding of the interaction between emotional and cognitive aspects in moral judgements. Fourth, I explain how the psychological phenomenon of objectification takes central stage in his thought. I conclude by showing how Westermarck's theory of moral emotions shows a continuous interplay between individual and social aspects of morality, which may also be called the interplay between the individual and society. In addition, I look at Durkheim's critique of his work.

Theory of retributive emotions

Westermarck suggests that there are two kinds of moral emotions, *moral approval* and *moral disapproval* or *indignation*. They belong to a wider group of emotions that may be called 'retributive', a term used by Westermarck in a broad sense to designate both positive and negative reactions. Negative retributive emotions are forms of *resentment*, which he defines as an 'aggressive' or 'hostile attitude of mind towards a cause of pain'. Positive retributive emotions are forms of *retributive kindly emotion*, defined as a 'friendly attitude of mind towards a cause of pleasure' (ODMI, pp. 21–22, 93, 314; ER, pp. 62–63, 68, 86, 172). The retributive nature of these emotions implies a tendency to reciprocity. Emotions of resentment motivate punishment, characterised by a 'desire to inflict pain in return for

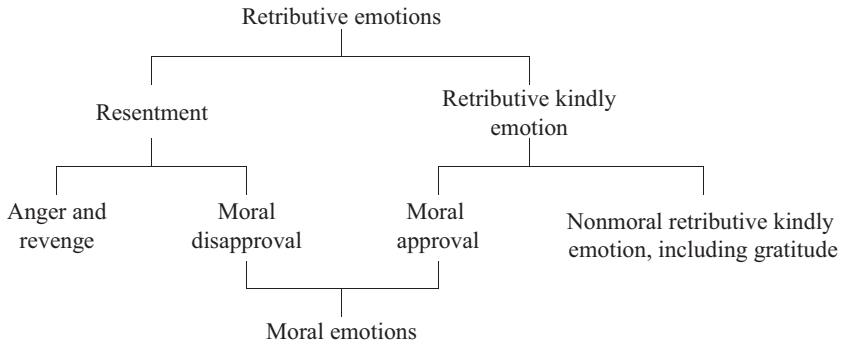


Figure 3.1 Westermarck's categorisation of retributive emotions, taken from ODMI, p. 21
 Source: *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. I. London: Macmillan.

pain inflicted'. 'Retributive kindly emotion' is characterised by a 'desire to produce pleasure in return for pleasure received' and may thus motivate people to return good for good (ODMI, p. 94). There are both moral and nonmoral retributive emotions. Moral disapproval or indignation is akin to *anger* and *revenge*, which are nonmoral forms of resentment. Moral approval is akin to *gratitude*, which is a nonmoral form of a 'retributively kindly emotion' (ODMI, pp. 21–22, ER, p. 63). Westermarck's categorisation of retributive emotions is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Although Westermarck does not always distinguish between the terms 'emotion' and 'feeling', the central theoretical parts of his works are consistent in using 'feeling' to denote reactions of pleasure and pain as distinguished from retributive emotions. This concerns, above all, his definition of retributive emotions and his description of how moral emotions arise by means of our first-order feelings of pleasure and pain. It was typical of Westermarck not to define his terms any more than necessary to introduce the reader to the ideas and distinctions he had in mind. However, Westermarck's lectures on psychology and ethics help to throw more light on his view of emotions. He argues that, although in colloquial language 'feeling' and 'emotion' indicate much the same thing, they can be distinguished from each other. For Westermarck, there are only two kinds of feelings, pleasure and pain. They are basic affective reactions humans share with a variety of living organisms, and 'everyone knows by experience what it means to feel pleasure and pain'.¹

These basic responses are at the core of Westermarck's theory of retributive emotions, because anger, revenge and moral disapproval are always directed

¹ Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 80: Lectures, Ethics: fragmentary pages), p. 4.

towards the cause of pain. Correspondingly, gratitude and moral approval are directed towards the cause of pleasure. We *react* to these feelings, because our retributive emotions are 'always reactions against pain or pleasure felt by ourselves' (ODMI, p. 108; ODMI, II, p. 739; ER, p. 96). Painful feelings are of biological importance in serving as warnings to the organism in order to avoid or remove the cause of danger. Conversely, the causes of pleasure are, generally speaking, biologically advantageous for organisms (or at least have been so at some point in the past). For this reason, pleasure is associated with the endeavour to retain its cause.² However, these affective reactions are not emotions.

Westermarck's view of emotion is componential, referring to emotions as mental states consisting of the elements of feeling, cognition and conation. The primary component of every emotion is pleasure or pain. Applied to his theory of retributive emotions, anger, revenge and moral disapproval are hostile states of mind dominated by the feeling of pain. Moral approval and gratitude, in turn, are dominated by the feeling of pleasure. A certain emotion may also contain both of these feelings. In Westermarck's view, anger and revenge do not consist exclusively of pain, since in these emotions the painful feeling may, to some extent, intermingle with pleasure. Similarly, gratitude does not consist exclusively of pleasure, because in some cases gratitude can also feel unpleasant and oppressing.³

Second, emotions are always bound to cognitions, by which Westermarck means sensations and ideas. Cognitions are insomuch interwoven with emotions that we cannot think back to an emotional state we have experienced without at the same time recalling the cognition to which it was related. Similarly, the lucidity of an emotion depends on how clearly we remember the related cognitions.⁴ Even though '[c]ertain cognitions inspire fear in nearly every breast', because of the individual variations in emotional disposition, 'same cognitions may give rise to emotions that differ, in quality or intensity, in different persons or in the same person on different occasions' (ER, p. 216; also ODMI, p. 11). Third, emotions are linked to bodily alterations which are in many cases visible to the eye. In psychological terms, the third constituent of emotion is the 'conative element' that gives emotions their reactive and motivational quality. Importantly, the conative element is a crucial part of retributive emotions as they involve the deep-rooted desire to reward or punish another person due to his or her actions.⁵

2 Westermarck (1915) (Box 80: Lectures, Psychology II), pp. 146–148; Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Psychology), p. 178a. Westermarck's description of pleasure and pain is much influenced by Harald Høffding ([1882] 1896, pp. 272–274). I take up some details of Westermarck's pleasure-pain psychology in Chapter 7.

3 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Psychology), p. 178a; Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 80: Lectures, Ethics: fragmentary pages), p. 4.

4 Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 80: Lectures, Ethics: fragmentary pages), p. 4; Westermarck (1915) (Box 80: Lectures, Psychology II), pp. 149–150.

5 Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 80: Lectures, Ethics: fragmentary pages), pp. 4–5.

As noted, moral disapproval is, for Westermarck, akin to anger and revenge. Although these two nonmoral retributive emotions are impossible to distinguish accurately, anger may be defined as 'sudden resentment, in which the hostile reaction against the cause of pain is unrestrained by deliberation'. That moral disapproval and anger stem from the same root shows also in their nonverbal expressions: 'When possessed with strong moral indignation, a person looks as if he were angry, and so he really is, in the wider sense of the term' (ODMI, pp. 22, 42; ER, pp. 64, 68–69). Importantly, the close relationship between anger and moral disapproval 'has been ignored by those who have described moral approval and disapproval merely as feelings of pleasure and pain' (ER, p. 69). The emotion of revenge, in turn, is a form of resentment that is 'more or less restrained by reason and calculation' (ODMI, p. 22; ER, p. 64). Compared to anger, revenge in Westermarck's sense of the term is more 'delayed reaction and therefore presupposes a certain ability to remember, and to make and stick to plans' (Ross, 1975, p. 126). Correspondingly, moral approval is an 'emotion of which moral praise or reward is the outward manifestation'. Moral approval is akin to gratitude, which involves 'a definite desire to give pleasure in return for pleasure received'. Gratitude is often mixed with a 'feeling of indebtedness', that is, 'he upon whom a benefit has been conferred feels himself as a debtor and regards the benefactor as his creditor' (ODMI, pp. 21–22, 93–95; ER, pp. 62–63, 86–88).

As we shall see in Chapter 6, one of the key features of Westermarck's theory of moral emotions is that they are directed towards living beings as the cause of pleasure or pain. In the same way, the anger of a hurt or irritated animal is directed towards the real or assumed offender, especially among the primates (ODMI, pp. 22, 37–38). It is due to the retributive nature of moral emotions that human beings feel anxious if an altruist is faced with ingratitude and, especially, if a wrongdoer does not receive some kind of punishment. Westermarck recognises that sometimes guilt extends according to group membership, as is the case with blood feuds or in cases where the parents of an offender guilty of a very serious wrong meet strong moral indignation. However, according to Westermarck, the agent is not overlooked even in such cases, because condemning emotions are targeted at persons assumed to be connected with the wrongdoer. The same applies to moral praise, which may be directed not only towards the benefactor, but may, at least to some extent, extend also to persons nearly related to the agent (ODMI, pp. 30–37, 95–96).

The evolution of retributive emotions

Westermarck construes retributive emotions as human universals, though their ways of expression and the behaviours they are directed to can be specific to particular cultures. Moral judgements are based on emotions expressing 'a mental constitution which has been acquired through the influence of natural selection', because they have a 'tendency to *promote the interests of the individuals who feel them*' (ODMI, pp. 41, 108, emphasis added). Westermarck's account of the evolution of retributive emotions is very brief and general. The emotions of resentment

seek punishment, and by them 'evils are averted' (ODMI, p. 95; ER, p. 88). Thus, regarding the origin of retributive emotions, 'the evolutionist can hardly entertain a doubt'. The emotion of resentment, 'like protective reflex action, out of which it gradually developed, is a means of protection for the animal'. In the more rudimentary forms of resentment that are widespread across the animal kingdom, there is not necessarily any actual desire to inflict pain or suffering on another individual, only the endeavour to remove the cause of danger. And to give his theory the broadest possible empirical basis, Westermarck explains that '[a]s we proceed still lower down the scale of animal life we find the conative element itself gradually dwindle away until nothing is left but mere reflex action' (ODMI, pp. 22, 40; also ER, pp. 68–69).

Similarly, for Westermarck, the origin of retributive kindly emotions is explained by Darwinian selection. As these emotions motivate humans to repay benevolent acts in kind, they are springs for reciprocity and by them 'benefits are secured'. Again, in the rudimentary forms of retributively kindly emotion found in simpler animals, there is no definite desire to produce pleasure, only an endeavour to retain the cause of the pleasure experienced (ODMI, pp. 93–95; ER, pp. 86, 88). What Westermarck suggests is that natural selection has favoured individuals who respond angrily and resentfully towards those who attempt to injure them. Similarly, it has favoured individuals who respond positively and kindly towards those who are friendly and helpful towards them. Westermarck's basic understanding about retributive emotions as characteristics humans share with other animals – and moral emotions as outgrowths of these rudimentary impulses – gains support from modern research on primate sociality. Frans de Waal (2001) explains that '[w]hen I watch primates, measuring how they share food in return for grooming, comfort victims of aggression, or wait for the right opportunity to get even with a rival, I see very much the same emotional impulses that Westermarck analysed' (p. 350).⁶

Another key feature of Westermarck's moral theory is that the emotions of resentment are considerably more prevalent and intense in their manifestations than are the kindly emotions. Similarly, owing to 'the uniformity of its function and its extreme importance in the life of the species' (ER, p. 68), resentment is widely prevalent in the animal kingdom. Retributive kindly emotion, on its part, is far less prevalent: 'In many animal species not even the germ of it is found, and where it occurs it is generally restricted within narrow limits'. This is explained by the fact that, in evolutionary terms, the emotions of resentment are built-in protective mechanisms that have immediate survival value for the individual. Another reason for this difference is that retributive kindly emotions occur only in cooperative animals that live in groups, and 'even gregarious animals have many enemies, but few friends' (ODMI, pp. 40–41, 94–95, 129; ER, pp. 68–69, 87–88, 98).

⁶ For overviews on the literature on reciprocity and associated emotional dispositions in primates, see Bonnie & de Waal (2004); Schino & Aureli (2009); Kappeler & van Schaik (2006).

Besides what happens in two-person interactions, the same difference in strength and frequency occurs between the positive and negative retributive emotions of third parties. Westermarck observes that the indignation of bystanders towards wrongdoers is almost without exception much stronger and more frequent than moral praise towards benefactors, even though in neither case does the agent's action concern the spectator personally. Besides the evolutionary reasons discussed above, the human disposition to envy and jealousy often weakens the strength of gratitude and moral approval people feel on the behalf of others, because they may evoke some kind of resentment not only towards the object of the benefit, but towards the benefactor as well (ODMI, p. 129; ER, p. 98).

These emphases are visible in the fact that, in his examination of retributive emotions, Westermarck pays considerably more attention to punitive emotions than rewarding ones. Similarly, in his study of various morally relevant behaviours, the main focus is on actions that tend to elicit moral disapproval, not moral praise. Simply put, 'disapproval has in all ages played a far more important part in the moral consciousness of mankind than approval' (ER, p. 122). This is because, first, the emotion of moral disapproval or indignation plays a crucial role in the emergence and maintenance of moral norms and, second, the desire to punish those who violate shared moral standards is a distinctive feature of human morality (ODMI, p. 122; ER, p. 111). In a wider perspective, without the retributive nature of moral disapproval, 'moral condemnation and the ideas of right and wrong would never have come into existence' (ODMI, p. 92; ER, p. 85). Similarly, for Westermarck, because moral indignation occurs universally more often and with more intense manifestations than moral approval, moral rules and laws concentrate universally mostly on proscriptions and punishment (Luoma, 1967, p. 33).

The characteristics of moral emotions: disinterestedness, impartiality and generality

As we have seen, according to Westermarck, moral emotions are closely akin to their nonmoral counterparts: moral approval to gratitude, and moral disapproval to anger and revenge. However, he was after something of the essence in human social reality when proposing that the moral emotions have their special characteristics that distinguish them from other retributive emotions. As Knud Haakonsen and Donald Winch (2006) put it, Westermarck presented 'simply an empirical hypothesis to the effect that people tend to give special status to commonly shared reactive passions and this special status is what we have come to call morality' (p. 383). As will become evident later on, Westermarck's way of exploring moral approval and disapproval in relation to similar emotions that lack certain observable characteristics that are specific to moral emotions bears a close resemblance to the analytic method employed by David Hume and Adam Smith.

To find out the attributes of moral emotions, Westermarck advises the examination of how people in practice express moral judgements. They are 'definite expressions of moral emotions' because 'such judgments could never have been

pronounced unless there had been moral emotions antecedent to them' (ODMI, p. 101; ER, p. 90). Westermarck's description of moral judgement is as follows:

Particular modes of conduct have their traditional labels, many of which are learnt with language itself; and the moral judgment commonly consists simply in labelling the act according to certain obvious characteristics which it presents in common with others belonging to the same group.

(ODMI, p. 9; ER, p. 115)

In other words, we observe certain kinds of actions – taking another's property or telling an untruth, for example – and these actions are traditionally called 'theft' and 'lying'. Theft and lying are generally considered wrong, and therefore these actions are also called wrong (ER, p. 115). Westermarck's view on the relation between emotions and moral judgements contains some important details that will be discussed later on in this chapter. In general terms, however, Westermarck suggests that moral judgements simply would not occur if moral emotions were not part of the human biological endowment.

To begin with, moral emotions are characterised by 'disinterestedness'. This means that they appear to be independent of our personal interests (ODMI, p. 101; ER, p. 90). If a person experiencing moral indignation or disapproval was himself the object to the action, he feels that 'his condemnation is not due to the particular circumstance that it is he himself who is the sufferer, that his judgment would be the same if anybody else in similar circumstances had been the victim' (ER, p. 90, emphasis added). Secondly, moral approval and disapproval are characterised by the appearance of 'impartiality'. Impartiality denotes that we assume that we would react in the same way regardless of who was the agent and who was the recipient of the act (ODMI, pp. 103–104; ER, pp. 92–93). Thus, as de Waal (2006) puts it, Westermarck suggests that moral approval and disapproval are connected to more 'general judgments of how *anyone* ought to be treated' (p. 20). Otherwise resentment is not moral disapproval, but more like 'personal anger' concerning more directly one's own interests. Similarly, retributive kindly emotion is moral approval only if it has the feel of disinterestedness and impartiality. Otherwise it is more like 'personal gratitude' (Westermarck, 1936b, pp. 233–234; 1939, p. 7).

It is important to understand that for Westermarck the recognition of these qualities does not mean that the moral emotions would be disinterested and impartial in some actual or objective sense. However, even when personal interest clearly affects how these emotions occur, people tend to view their moral opinions as disinterested (ODMI, p. 101; ER, p. 91). Similarly, impartiality can be 'real or apparent'. In other words, in reality our moral beliefs and judgements are often biased in favour of one party over another, but 'not knowingly' (ER, p. 93; also ODMI, p. 104). Simply put, 'Westermarck did not claim that the behaviors motivated by the moral emotions are necessarily moral in any larger sense. They only become moral when people see them as moral and thus only when they appear disinterested and impartial' (Wolf, 2008, p. 193).

As the third distinctive feature of moral emotions, Westermarck introduces 'a certain flavour of generality'. This suggests that when making moral evaluations, people do not usually feel like expressing merely their personal opinion. Quite the opposite, moral judgements have typically a reference to the emotions of others as well. By this Westermarck means that they include a 'vague assumption' that the great majority, or at least the group of people one identifies with, would respond the same way in a similar situation. This feeling of generality is found even when the person is aware that his or her viewpoint is not shared by others: 'He then feels that it *would be* shared if other people knew the act and all its attendant circumstances as well as he does himself, and if, at the same time, their emotions were as refined as are his own'. This typical feature of moral experience is manifested such that '[e]ven when standing alone, he feels that his conviction is shared at least by an ideal society, by all those who see the matter as clearly as he does himself' (ODMI, pp. 104–105, 123).

The flavour of generality characterises moral emotions as 'public emotions' that certain acts have a tendency to arouse in a given society or social group. People of similar backgrounds tend to react in the same way to similar behaviours and phenomena, and 'this touch of generality, which belongs to public approval and public indignation', is never found in our more personal emotions of gratitude and revenge (ODMI, 105). These three characteristics of moral emotions can be summarised by saying that when our indignation is *moral indignation*, we feel our reaction is justified. We think that *anyone* in the same situation would respond with similar righteous indignation.⁷ On the other hand, nonmoral retributive emotions stemming directly from our immediate situation are more difficult to justify or defend by appealing to others, or to the collective good, because other people do not as readily share these emotions. It is noteworthy that Westermarck omitted the 'flavour of generality' as the characteristic of moral emotions by the time of publishing *Ethical Relativity* in 1932. However, this change in his moral theory is not very substantial because his permanent notion that moral emotions are typically 'public emotions' that are shared in a given society or social group as regards certain behaviours encompasses much of the contents he attached earlier to his notion of generality.

Self-directed retributive emotions

Besides emotions that are directed towards others, Westermarck also analyses retributive emotions we feel towards ourselves. In his definition, 'moral self-condemnation' or 'remorse' is a 'hostile attitude of mind towards one's self as the cause of pain'. Being also a retributive emotion, it 'involves, vaguely or distinctly, some desire to suffer'. Although this emotion, too, varies in strength in different

7 Frans de Waal (2006) emphasises that in this Westermarckian area of moral emotions, dealing with right and wrong at a more abstract level, 'humans seem to go radically further than other primates' (p. 20).

conditions and in different individuals, Westermarck observes that '[w]e may feel actual hatred towards ourselves, we may desire to inflict bodily suffering upon ourselves as a punishment for what we have done'. Remorse can reach such levels of intolerability that it leads offenders to expose themselves voluntarily, even with the awareness of the severe punishment that will follow. On the other hand, 'moral self-approval' is a 'kindly emotion, a friendly attitude towards one's self as a cause of pleasure'. It is not merely personal satisfaction with one's conduct, but it contains a notion of social recognition and makes one feel that 'one's own conduct merits praise or reward' (ODMI, pp. 105–106; also ER, p. 94).

Like other-directed retributive emotions, Westermarck distinguishes between nonmoral and moral self-directed retributive emotions. He recognises that we may be angry with ourselves for purely selfish reasons, as is the case when we regret having acted contrary to our own interests. Similarly, we may feel self-approval on egoistic grounds, such as when succeeding in bringing benefits to ourselves or our close ones. It is only when remorse and self-approval possess the characteristics of disinterestedness and impartiality that we can begin to speak of them as moral emotions (ODMI, pp. 106–107; ER, p. 95). This points to the fact that remorse, which appears to be felt merely due to social disapproval or the fear of punishment, does not appear as real or genuine in the eyes of others. Similarly, we do not consider self-approval as moral or justified if a person appears to feel it in consequence of an obviously self-interested or unjust act. Like other-directed moral emotions, self-approval and remorse also appear the most evident when they go together with the knowledge or implicit assumption of being socially shared (ODMI, p. 107). The retributive emotions Westermarck included in his edifice can thus be classified according to (1) whether they seek punishment or reward; (2) whether they are nonmoral or moral and (3) whether they are other-directed or self-directed.

The origin of moral emotions (I): disinterestedness

Thus far we have seen that Westermarck argues that the evolutionary origin of retributive emotions – both in their moral and nonmoral forms – is accounted for by their biological 'usefulness' for the individuals who feel them (ODMI, pp. 94–95, 108; ER, pp. 88, 95). However, he presents different types of explanations for the origin of the specific moral elements discussed above. This approach may be illustrated by his perspective on moral judgements in general. As Ronald Fletcher (1982) puts it, 'when Westermarck spoke of the "origins" of moral ideas [. . .] he was distinctly not entering into a kind of chronological historical quest for the *first instances* of them'. By origin he 'clearly meant the distinctive *socio-psychological* context within which they arose, and which gave rise to them' (p. 207). Westermarck explains that in order for us to 'discover the origin of those elements in the moral emotions by which they are distinguished from other, non-moral, retributive emotions', we must identify and 'distinguish between different classes of conditions under which disinterested retributive emotions arise' (ODMI, p. 108; ER, p. 95). In other words, Westermarck was to trace the combination of

psychological and social factors in human experience that underlie the expressions of moral approval and disapproval.

Westermarck's account of the disinterested character of moral emotions is part of his analysis of why human beings in general feel retributive emotions on behalf of others. In Westermarck's view, retributive emotions may acquire the feeling and appearance that they are independent of one's personal interests through three kinds of conditions. They relate to (1) our capacity to sympathise with the feelings of others; (2) another kind of emotional contagion where retributive emotions are transmitted from one person to another and (3) the reactions of liking and disliking that may be released in a variety of conditions. I will look at each of these in turn and then examine Westermarck's more complex account of the impartial and general nature of moral emotions.

Sympathy as the source of disinterested retributive emotions

Westermarck begins by observing that disinterested retributive emotions frequently arise via sympathy. We may feel disinterested disapproval and approval 'on account of an injury inflicted, or a benefit conferred, upon another person with whose pain, or pleasure, we sympathise, and in whose welfare we take a kindly interest' (ODMI, p. 108; ER, pp. 95–96). In Westermarck's view,

Man is by nature both resentful and sympathetic. When he sees some of his comrades suffer injury or death at the hands of another individual, he feels pain and resentment himself, and, though not himself a direct object of the injury, he desires that the offender shall be punished. In this simple combination of resentment and sympathy we have a fact of extreme importance for the moulding of the moral consciousness.

(Westermarck, 1898, p. 306)

More specifically, the feelings of pleasure and pain may be transmitted from one person to another merely via their bodily expressions: 'The sight of a happy face tends to produce some degree of pleasure in him who sees it; the sight of the bodily signs of suffering tends to produce a feeling of pain' (ODMI, p. 109; ER, p. 96). Second, sympathetic feelings may arise from observing acts and situations. This means that we, as spectators, instinctively anticipate the emotional reactions that are usually associated with certain acts or situations – 'a blow may cause pain to the spectator before he has witnessed its effect on the victim'. It is through perceiving the situational context that we may sympathise with another without detecting a similar emotion in that person. This is the case when we 'feel resentment on his [an injured individual] behalf though he himself feels none' (ODMI, pp. 109, 114; ER, pp. 96, 106). By the same token, we may feel gratitude towards a benefactor though the recipient of an altruistic act shows none. However, the emotions of disapproval, in particular, are intensified when both of these causes – the perception of emotional displays and their situational contexts – are simultaneously producing the emotion (ODMI, p. 109).

So, what does Westermarck mean by sympathy? He is consistent in his notion that sympathy is neither a single emotion nor a process through which emotions arise. Instead, Westermarck speaks of sympathy in the sense of *sympathetic feelings or emotions*, denoting feelings and emotions that we feel as reactions to similar feelings and emotions in others. This can happen even when we do not observe any emotional expressions in the person concerned, since, as noted above, sympathetic feelings and emotions may arise as a consequence of observing acts or situations alone. At the same time, it is slightly misleading to suggest that Westermarck 'seems to have been one of the last writers to use the term "sympathy" in its 18th century naturalistic sense, denoting simply the transfer of emotions of any kind, positive or negative, from one person to another' (Hintikka, 2006, p. 43). This is because Westermarck distinguishes between sympathy in the sense of mere transfer of feelings or emotions and 'what is generally understood by sympathy' (ODMI, p. 109).

The reasoning behind this is that, for Westermarck, sharing the feelings and emotions alone is not sufficient for us to feel disinterested moral emotions on the behalf of other people. In order for these emotions to arise, sympathy 'requires the cooperation of the *altruistic sentiment or affection*' (ODMI, p. 110; ER, pp. 96–97, emphasis added). Whenever Westermarck talks about the manifestations of moral emotions through sympathy, he means sympathetic emotional reactions that involve the influence of altruistic sentiment. It is in this sense that 'sympathy produces in us disinterested retributive emotions, when the individual towards whom we are kindly disposed is hurt or benefited' (ER, p. 98).⁸ This should, however, not be understood as coupling sympathy with *altruistic action*. Westermarck's primary interest on the subject of sympathy lies in explaining the *arousal of moral emotions in the spectator*, not in the study of action that sympathy may motivate.

What, then, is the altruistic sentiment that serves as a key element in Westermarck's view of sympathy? In Westermarck's sense of the term, 'sentiments' in themselves cannot be felt at any given moment, but they are psychological dispositions that may give rise to many different emotions. This may be clarified by considering that, in addition to 'altruistic sentiment', Westermarck discusses also 'maternal', 'paternal' and 'patriotic' sentiments. The sentiment of altruism denotes 'a disposition of mind which is particularly apt to display itself as kindly emotion towards other beings'. It is crucial for the study of how moral emotions arise, because this 'sentiment, only, induces us to take a kindly interest in the feelings of our neighbours' (ODMI, p. 110; ER, pp. 96–97).⁹ It is

8 In the sense of sharing another person's emotions, sympathy is today usually referred to as 'emotional empathy' and when including perspective-taking, 'cognitive empathy'. For a discussion on the conceptual transition from sympathy to empathy in psychology and social psychology during the twentieth century, see Jahoda (2005). For different conceptualisations and uses of sympathy in British psychology and philosophy at the end of 1800s and the turn of the century, see Lanzoni (2009); Debes (2015).

9 Westermarck's dispositional use of the term 'sentiment' can be explicitly traced to the work of his close friend, British philosopher-psychologist Alexander Shand (ODMI, p. 110; Shand, 1896).

obvious that there are vicarious emotional responses that do not involve a kind attitude towards another person. In such cases, the other person's condition may be 'a matter of complete indifference' to the spectator. It is only due to the altruistic sentiment that we 'to some extent identify, as it were, our feelings with those of our neighbour'. Through this, 'we naturally look upon any person who causes him pleasure or pain as the cause of our sympathetic pleasure or pain, and are apt to experience towards that person a retributive emotion similar in kind, if not always in degree, to the emotion which we feel when we are ourselves benefited or injured' (ODMI, pp. 109–111; also ER, pp. 96–97).

The contagion of retributive emotions

In addition to sympathy, Westermarck suggests that disinterested approval and disapproval may arise from observing the outward signs of retributive emotions in others. Emotional contagion of this kind may seem identical to Westermarck's account of sympathy, but he distinguishes between them. While sympathy is about the spectator's affective responses to the benefits and harms caused to others, retributive emotions are in many cases transferred from one person to another without the second person being aware of the cause of the original emotion (ODMI, pp. 114, 117; ER, pp. 105–106, 108). As 'a group of chimpanzees may be thrown into a state of blind fury by the angry cries of one of its members', one may be sucked into the anger of a crowd without being aware of its cause (ER, p. 106; also ODMI, p. 114). Anger or indignation that is transmitted from one individual to another and that spreads in groups is 'of considerable importance both as an originator and a communicator of moral ideas'. Language, too, may convey retributive emotions, as is the case when moral disapproval is evoked by the perception of signs of strong indignation in speech. Similarly, emotions of approval may be produced by perceiving signs of positive retributive emotions in others (ODMI, pp. 114–117; ER, pp. 106–108).

For Westermarck, these forms of disapproval can even be considered as 'the main foundation of moral tradition'. Moral standards can outlive the conditions from which they originate, and some matters elicit moral disapproval without anyone quite knowing why. The original causes of moral condemnation 'may have been ignorance, superstition, prejudice, or sheer selfishness in those who once laid down the rules of conduct, and their prescriptions may nevertheless be indiscriminately and thoughtlessly accepted by succeeding generations' (Westermarck, 1936b, pp. 235, 238–239; also ODMI, p. 121). These effects are further boosted by the fact that human beings are strongly inclined to share the moral disapproval of those they respect, and thus to have similar moral opinions. Quoting Hobbes, Westermarck asserts that people are often 'like little children, that have no other rule of good and evil manners, but the correction they receive from their Parents, and Masters' (ODMI, pp. 115, 121; ER, pp. 106–107, 110–111).

Reactions of disliking and liking

In the cases discussed above, retributive emotions are reactions to feelings and emotions felt by other people. In the third type of condition through which disinterested retributive emotions may arise, these emotions are quite independent of the emotions of others. Moral emotions often derive from reactions of disliking or disgust, termed by Westermarck as 'disinterested antipathies' and 'sentimental aversions'. People often 'feel hostile to a person who inflicts no injury on anybody' (ER, p. 107), and this is an equally important moral psychology phenomenon as our capacity to sympathise with others. It is not unusual that 'when a certain act, which does no harm – apart from the painful impression it makes on the spectator – fills people with disgust or horror, they may feel less inclined to inflict harm upon the agent than if he had committed an offence against person, property, or good name' (ER, pp. 107–108; also ODMI, p. 116). Emotional aversions that lead to moral disapproval may concern such apparently trivial phenomena as differences of taste, habit, or opinion (ODMI, p. 116; ER, p. 107). Similarly, 'antipathy which is so commonly felt against anything unusual, new, or foreign, may lead to the idea that it is wrong' (ER, p. 107).

The human repertoire of emotions includes also 'disinterested likings' that lead people to react positively to another person. An example of such responses is the admiration or esteem people may feel towards courage quite irrespective of the purpose of the associated action (ODMI, p. 117; ER, p. 108). Moreover, in many cases the spectator's reactions of liking give rise to the moral approval of conduct that concerns only the agent's own interests (ODMI II, pp. 266–267). Also here, Westermarck emphasises the significance of emotional contagion and social environment because '[w]e are easily affected by the aversions and likings of our neighbours' and these emotions increase when we observe similar emotions in others (ODMI, p. 116).

The origin of moral emotions (II): impartiality and generality

Let us now turn to Westermarck's view that moral emotions are not characterised only by disinterestedness, but also by the appearance of impartiality and 'the feeling of being publicly shared' (ODMI, p. 117). These latter are due to the fact that it is not only one person who reacts in a certain way but almost all members of a social group are inclined to react with similar retributive emotions to similar events. The emotions of moral approval and disapproval are typically felt generally with relation to certain behaviours, or the individual at least feels that others *should* respond similarly. The specific impression that one's reaction or judgement is justified, with real or assumed social backing, attaches moral emotions to social customs (ODMI, pp. 117–121; ER, pp. 108–111).

Customs are at the heart of Westermarck's theory of moral emotions because people tend to experience their approval and disapproval as impartial and socially shared when they are in congruence with established social customs. In short, customs are universally conceived as 'moral rules' whose breach has a tendency

to evoke moral disapproval (ODMI, pp. 118–121; ER, pp. 109–111). The central importance given to sympathy, the contagion of retributive emotions and customs shows that Westermarck linked morality closely to its social context: ‘Society is the school in which we learn to distinguish between right and wrong. The head-master is Custom, and the lessons are the same for all the members of the community’ (ER, p. 50; also ODMI, p. 9).

Thus far I have been concerned with Westermarck’s descriptive account of ‘*how* retributive emotions may become apparently impartial and be coloured by a feeling of generality’ (ODMI, p. 117, emphasis added). Moving from description to explanation, Westermarck says that

the real problem which we have now to solve is [. . .] *why* disinterestedness, apparent impartiality, and the flavour of generality have become characteristics by which so-called moral emotions are distinguished from other retributive emotions. The solution of this problem lies in the fact that society is the birthplace of the moral consciousness.

(ODMI, p. 117, emphasis added; also ER, pp. 108–109)

When the idea of society as ‘the birthplace of the moral consciousness’ is analysed in the context of the overall arguments of the *Moral Ideas*, it becomes clear that it is a very succinct way to phrase Westermarck’s complex notion concerning the *evolutionary context in which the uniquely human moral emotions evolved* and became part of our biological heritage. Society is, for Westermarck, ‘an association of individuals of the same species characterised by some kind of cooperation’.¹⁰ In his view, the tendency to feel moral emotions evolved by natural selection in the context of ancestral close-knit social communities. These emotions gave a selective advantage to individuals who feel them because in such conditions the individual and group interests coincide (ODMI, p. 108; ODMI II, pp. 195–198). The question is about associated individuals responding with moral approval to behaviours that simultaneously benefit themselves and others, and above all, with moral indignation to behaviours that threaten them. I will return to these issues in more detail in the next chapter. At this stage, it is sufficient to note that, for Westermarck, ‘the first moral judgments expressed, not the private emotions of isolated individuals, but *emotions felt by the society at large*’ (ODMI, pp. 117–118; ER, 109, emphasis added). And because the moral emotions evolved in close interaction with elementary rules of conduct, ‘[t]he origin of custom as a moral rule no doubt lies in a very remote period of human history’ (ODMI, p. 124).

10 LSE Archives: Lake Barnett (1911) (Notebook: Social institutions – Professor Westermarck, Summer Term 1911), p. 4; Mitrany (1916) (Social institutions – Westermarck), p. 6. This definition is repeated verbatim in both student lecture notes. Similarly, according to another student at LSE, Westermarck regarded society as ‘a grouping characterized by more or less cooperation, not necessarily involving physical proximity’ (Harper, 1933, p. 337).

Customs are also important for Westermarck's comparative investigations, which focus mainly on 'tribal and national customs and laws' (ODMI, p. 158). Despite the close relationship between customs and moral beliefs introduced above, it was clear to Westermarck that the moral components of custom and law are not necessarily shared by all members of a society (ODMI, p. 161). However, generally speaking, '[c]ustoms and laws express the general feelings of the community and punish acts that shock them' (Westermarck, 1936a, p. 236). Customs are central to the study of morality because 'the only way in which we can get an insight into people's feelings and ideas is by studying their conduct'.¹¹ Even '[t]he laws themselves, in fact, command obedience more as customs than as laws'. Since social customs serve as the approximate benchmark for people's notions of right and wrong, Westermarck emphasises that in contemporary Western societies, too, 'the ordinary citizen stands in no need of studying the laws under which he lives, custom being generally the safe guiding star of his conduct'. As the determining factor of moral standards, customs have universally 'proved stronger than law and religion combined' (ODMI, pp. 164–166).

Westermarck's concept of custom

In Westermarck's definition, customs are 'public habits', by which he means 'the habits of a certain group of men, a racial or national community, a class or rank of society' (ODMI, p. 118; ER, p. 109). In his published lectures on 'The history of customs', Westermarck begins his discussion on the formation of customs by pointing out that 'certain kinds of actions can become common in a society as a consequence of more or less blind instincts'. These customs are above all associated with parental care and incest avoidance, occurring in relatively similar forms everywhere. Second, many customs can be traced to magical or religious beliefs, while others are based on utilitarian considerations. Third, the emergence of customs and their maintenance over generations is much influenced by the strong human tendency to imitate what others around us do. Imitation influences human behaviour together with 'the specific force of habit, i.e., the force that is included in public habit as habit' (Westermarck, 1912, pp. 2–3).¹²

The influence of habit shows that when we act in a certain manner, we tend to act similarly under similar circumstances. Since 'the same external effects are disposed to evoke the same motion effect', when we become accustomed to doing certain things, 'we gradually come to perform them automatically'. Our actions turn easily into nonreflective habits, and 'customs become sorts of social reflexes'. As a result, there is a high degree of uniformity in human activities, and in many situations people act in similar ways without knowing the reason why (Westermarck, 1912, pp. 2–3). In addition to these causes, and partially overlapping

11 Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 43a: University of London, 'Lectures at the University College'), p. 8.

12 For Westermarck's discussion of the role of utilitarian conceptions, see ODMI II, pp. 52, 110–111, 332–335, 660–663.

with them, Westermarck emphasises the importance of emotional disgust because 'aversions which are generally felt readily lead to moral disapproval and prohibitory customs or laws' (ER, p. 249).¹³ Finally, according to Westermarck, many basic moral rules are based on our capacity to sympathise with the feelings and emotions of others.

This leads us to Westermarck's view of the intimate connection between habits and institutions. He defines social institutions as 'social relationships regulated by society', and such established forms of social interaction are essentially customs.¹⁴ 'Social habits', Westermarck says, 'have a strong tendency to become true customs, that is, rules of conduct in addition to their being habits' (HHM I, p. 69). In other words, 'customs of a people are an outcome of collective mental activity in a much deeper sense than being merely a habitual repetition of certain modes of behaviour' (Westermarck, 1936a, pp. 237–238). This is because there is a very close connection between the two main characteristics of custom, 'its habitualness and its obligatoriness' (ODMI, p. 159). What gives custom its chief binding and coercive force is the emotion of moral disapproval that is felt generally in a certain group of people. As Morris Ginsberg (1982) puts it, Westermarck suggests that these emotions give rise to customary rules, 'but having come to be established in a given community they are upheld by the tendency of their violation to arouse disapproval whether or not the act in itself, i.e., apart from its being condemned by custom, would arouse emotions in particular individuals' (p. 9).

It was obvious for Westermarck that not all public habits are structured morally. In other words, 'not every public habit is a custom, involving an obligation'. In all societies, we find habits that most people, in principle, condemn, but that are, after all, quite common. Such behaviours pass as allowed, or the disapproval they generate is not, at any rate, 'very deep or genuine' (ODMI, p. 159). On the other hand, when social habits become regulated and sanctioned by custom, some in addition by law, they are transformed into what Westermarck understood as social institutions. The core of Westermarck's theory of moral norms is that the emotion of moral disapproval cannot be excluded from the analysis of this process of institutionalisation. This particular emotion 'is at the bottom of the rules of custom and of all duties and rights' (HHM I, p. 71).

13 See also ODMI, p. 121; ODMI II, p. 185. Research on incest avoidance is increasingly proceeding towards the origin of the incest taboo through the analysis of third-party attitudes (Lieberman, Tooby, and Cosmides, 2003; Fessler & Navarrete, 2004; Antfolk et al., 2012). Despite the vibrant discussion and scholarship on these issues, Westermarck's more wide-ranging perspective on human disgust is poorly known. In his view, attitudes relating to sexuality and especially homosexuality have traditionally been shaped by emotional aversion (Westermarck, 1936b, p. 239; ODMI II, pp. 483–484). The same applies to various prohibitions concerning food (ODMI II, pp. 324–326, 332), the basic standards of personal cleanliness (ODMI II, pp. 346, 351–352) and attitudes towards bestiality and cannibalism (ODMI II, pp. 576–577, 580; Westermarck, 1917, p. 749).

14 LSE Archives: Lake Barnett (1911) (Notebook: Social institutions – Professor Westermarck, Summer Term 1911), p. 2; Lake Barnett (1911) (Social rights and duties), pp. 1–3; Mitrany (1916) (Social institutions – Westermarck), p. 3.

In his lectures Westermarck (1912) emphasises that ‘the influence of custom is especially strong in less developed societies, where the public opinion is more uniform, and emotions and beliefs are more homogenous’ (p. 4). In primitive societies, customs are ‘the only moral rules ever thought of’ and the ‘opinions of the many are the opinions of all’ (ODMI, pp. 119–120, 161). On the other hand, the binding force of custom is lessened by the ‘progress in culture’ and ‘advancement in civilisation’. This in turn enables the ‘differentiation of moral ideas’ (ODMI, pp. 122, 161). There is certain ambiguity in Westermarck’s position on the extent to which customary practices determine ‘primitive’ morality. On the one hand, he writes that the ‘savage strictly complies with the Hegelian command that no man must have a private conscience’ (ODMI, pp. 119–120; ER, pp. 109–110). Similarly, as an illustrative example of primitive human condition, he cites the following: ‘Solitary individuals amongst them rarely adopt any new opinions, or any new course of procedure. They follow the multitude to do evil, and they follow the multitude to do good. They think in herds’ (ODMI, p. 119).

At the same time, Westermarck criticises Durkheim and his disciples for overrating the ‘homogeneity of the group-mind’. In his view, it is essential to keep in mind that even among ‘savages’, ‘the homogeneity of thoughts and actions inside society is not absolute’. To support his argument on primitive individuality, Westermarck points to ethnographic research conducted by his students among the native peoples of Siberia and Kiwai Papuans of New Guinea in the 1910s. Even in such conditions, there existed considerable individuality in actions and beliefs, and ‘it is hardly possible to distinguish in every case between practices and beliefs which are general and such as are individual’ (HHM I, pp. 18–19).¹⁵ The same even applies to religious conceptions, which Durkheim regarded as an ‘essentially collective phenomenon’ (Westermarck, 1932b, p. 167). Westermarck concludes that because anthropologists have failed to distinguish between ideas and beliefs that are general and those that are individual, social scientists ‘must be warned against making too liberal a use of the term “collective ideas”, or that favourite expression of the French sociologists, “representations collectives”’ (HHM I, pp. 18–19).

The emotional basis of moral judgements

It is sometimes argued that Westermarck’s approach to morality ignores the role of reflective processes and the interplay between emotional experiences and cognitive factors (Joas, 2005; Hodgson, 2012). However, while arguing that moral judgements are based on moral emotions, he emphasises that these emotions

¹⁵ Westermarck refers here to Finnish ethnologist Kai Donner’s (1915) fieldwork in Siberia and the anthropologist-sociologist Gunnar Landtman’s (1927, 1931) ethnography among the Kiwai Papuans. Also in dealing with Durkheimian sociology in his private correspondence, Westermarck invokes to Landtman’s findings on religion as an indication of ‘how careful one must be when assessing collective ideas among primitive people’ (Westermarck (2011), letter to Rolf Lagerborg March 5, 1932; Lagerborg, 1951, p. 428).

depend substantially on cognitive processes such as the interpretation of situations, the level of reflection, and differences in knowledge and beliefs. In this sense, moral emotions have a 'cognitive basis' (ER, p. 60). Cognitions, or 'sensations or ideas', modify the moral emotions and, by implication, moral judgements in various ways. First, all retributive emotions, like all more complex emotions, 'are determined by cognitions'. Consequently, these emotions 'vary according as the cognitions vary, and the nature of a cognition may very largely depend upon reflection or insight'. This shows that our indignation with a person who tells an untruth may die away when we discover that his or her motive was benevolent. Similarly, we feel anger when someone hurts us, but our anger subsides when we realise that what happened was an accident. 'The change of cognitions, or ideas, has thus produced a change of emotions' (ODMI II, p. 744; also ER, p. 147).¹⁶ Second, different behaviours and human qualities may generate moral indignation due to religious or magical beliefs that are connected with them, and these emotions may change when those beliefs change or disappear (ODMI II, pp. 744–746; ER, p. 187). Third, an increase in knowledge may affect moral emotions by providing people with a better understanding of psychological facts. This underlies, for example, the changes in moral evaluation concerning acts performed by persons with mental illnesses (ODMI, pp. 269–277, 298–299, 316; ER, pp. 168–170).

In contrast to the pure emotivism of Westermarck's early moral theory discussed in the previous chapter, his mature position does not identify moral judgements with emotional expressions. He stresses that '[t]he theory of the emotional origin of moral judgements I am here advocating does not imply that such a judgment affirms the existence of a moral emotion in the mind of the person who utters it' (ER, p. 114; see also ODMI, p. 4). It is of course true that people very often express moral judgements because some things arouse approval or disapproval in them. But equally, for Westermarck, moral judgements are often uttered 'without feeling any emotion at all' (ER, p. 114), or at least that emotions are involved to a very limited extent, insofar as completely nonemotional mental states can exist at all.

Another important aspect of Westermarck's position is that he does not claim that moral judgements can in every individual case be directly traced to the retributive moral emotions. It is rather that many different emotions may lead people into making moral evaluations (ER, p. 62). Instead, Westermarck (1900) makes a more wide-ranging and general point, namely, that 'without such emotions there would have been no moral predicates at all' (p. 184). Strictly speaking, we are dealing with the *emotional basis of moral concepts* human beings use when making moral judgements. The question Westermarck regarded essential for ethical inquiry was 'whether there are any specific emotions that have led to *the formation of the concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, and all other moral concepts, and therefore may be appropriately named moral emotions*' (ER, p. 62, emphasis added). The relationship between moral concepts and moral emotions was close

16 See also ODMI, pp. 10, 319, 321–322; ER, pp. xvii, 59, 147, 180–181, 187, 216.

to Westermarck's heart, as is evident from the fact that he devoted individual chapters to the subject in the *Moral Ideas* and *Ethical Relativity* and again summarised his conclusions in *Christianity and Morals*. This was necessary because the topic 'has been much neglected by the moralists of the emotional school, although it is evidently a matter of paramount importance' (ER, pp. 117–118).

What Westermarck suggests is that, when we look at how, and under what circumstances, people use certain concepts when discussing moral issues, it comes out that the notions of 'bad', 'vice', 'wrong', 'ought', 'duty', 'right', 'rights', 'justice' and 'injustice' are ultimately rooted in moral disapproval, whereas the notions of 'good', 'virtue' and 'merit' are rooted in moral approval. Bear in mind Westermarck's step back from simple emotivism. He does sometimes

style="padding-left: 40px;">speak of moral concepts as 'direct expressions' of emotions, but more often he puts the relationship between a moral concept and an emotion back a stage: such concepts can be 'traced back to', are 'ultimately based on' emotions; emotions are 'at the bottom' of the moral concepts.

(Stroup, 1981, pp. 220–221)

Westermarck restricts his analysis to the principal terms used in English, which, however, have equivalents in other European languages as well. He openly leaves others to decide to what extent these concepts have equivalents in other languages. In any case, that all people 'have moral emotions is as certain as that they have customs, and there can be no doubt that they give expression to those emotions in their speech' (ODMI, p. 131; ER, p. 118).

Many philosophers during the twentieth century have read Westermarck as aiming to offer an analysis of the meaning and logical relations of moral concepts. However, this kind of interpretation tends to distort the nature of Westermarck's approach (Stroup, 1981; Salmela, 2003). Instead of analysing moral concepts from the logical and semantic perspective of analytical philosophy, Westermarck aimed at providing a genetic account of how these terms arise and come to be used (Stroup, 1981, p. 225). In the *Moral Ideas*, Westermarck even emphasises his analysis of moral concepts as crucial to the validity of his whole theory of moral emotions:

We have assumed that the moral concepts are essentially generalisations of tendencies in certain phenomena to call forth moral emotions. We have further assumed that there are two kinds of moral emotions: indignation and approval. If these assumptions hold good, *either indignation or approval must be at the bottom of every moral concept.*

(ODMI, p. 131, emphasis added)

He was aware that, when we speak of human actions and characteristics in moral terms, we are not usually discussing our emotions but qualities we attribute to acts and persons. However, for Westermarck, the moral concepts we use when passing moral judgements are essentially 'generalizations of tendencies to feel

moral emotions' (ER, p. 91). Ultimately, Westermarck sought to demonstrate that human beings formulate and use moral concepts in a fairly uniform way. These concepts refer to phenomena – typically actions and character traits – that have a tendency to arouse moral emotions. We are used to calling certain classes of acts good or bad 'because they have evoked moral approval or disapproval in ourselves or in other persons from whom we have learned the use of those words'. People learn the meaning and scope of these concepts easily, since many of the moral labels attached to certain modes of conduct are learned with the language itself. Finally, when the use of these concepts is learned, they can be brought into play without experiencing the particular emotions of moral approval and disapproval (ER, pp. 114–116).

Whatever one thinks of the details of Westermarck's account of moral concepts, it seems indisputable that the ways in which people use and apply these concepts reveal traces of their emotional origin. However, as Stroup (1982a) emphasises, when Westermarck discusses the relationship of moral concepts and judgements to moral emotions, he often uses the word 'ultimately' to underline the indirectness of the relation, 'and the word cannot be stressed enough'. Moral concepts are generalisations of our tendencies to feel moral emotions, but generalisations that comprise a mixture of emotions, cognitive elements and objectification (pp. 195–196). The psychological phenomenon of objectification, being one of the centre-pieces of Westermarck's ethics, warrants a brief review.

Objectification of emotions

For Westermarck, objectification refers to a typical feature of moral judgements. It is also a crucial factor underlying the disinterested, impartial and public nature of moral emotions. By objectification, Westermarck means the human tendency to interpret one's subjective experiences as external, objective facts (ODMI, p. 8; ER, p. 49). More specifically, it is a question of the tendency to interpret our emotions as the qualities of objects and phenomena that give rise to them. This takes place by attributing seemingly self-evident moral qualities to acts and character traits that are the objects of moral judgements. Westermarck suggests that when we regard acts like theft, murder or deceit as wrong and immoral, we hold the wrongness as an intrinsic quality of these acts. However, in reality, the question is of the emotion of moral disapproval that the act arouses in us or to which we otherwise refer.

Although Westermarck argues that the 'tendency to assign objectivity to our subjective experience' is 'particularly strong and persistent with regard to our moral experience' (ER, p. 49), he does not confine the phenomenon of objectification to the moral realm: 'A similar translation of emotional states into terms of qualities assigned to external phenomena are found in many other cases: something is "fearful" because people fear it, "admirable" because people admire it' (ER, p. 114). Moral emotions are comparable to sense perceptions, which are also attributed as the qualities of objects. People pronounce 'certain acts to be good or bad on account of the emotions those acts aroused in their minds', just as they

call 'sunshine warm and ice cold on account of certain sensations which they experienced' (ODMI, p. 4).

Besides isolating the process of objectification and recognising its importance for moral evaluation, Westermarck raises chief factors that strengthen its influence. Much of this has to do with the fact that, as John Mackie (1980) puts it in his study of Hume's moral theory, 'projection or objectification is not just a trick of individual psychology' but rather a social phenomenon 'in which the sentiments of each person both modify and reinforce those of others' (p. 70). To understand the full breadth of Westermarck's thesis of objectification, it is important to take both its individual psychological and social dimensions into account.

In the first place, according to Westermarck, people are inclined to assume that similar objects and events arouse similar impressions in the minds of others. Because of the substantial similarity of the human intellectual and emotional constitution, this assumption is often just about right – at least within a given moral community (ER, pp. 49–50; ODMI, p. 8). To quote Brand Blanshard's (1961) excellent account of Westermarck's argument, the tendency to objectivise our moral emotions when they are like those of others is similar to saying 'when I report that snow is white, everybody else confirms it', 'when I say a rainbow is beautiful, everyone understands and agrees', and 'when I say that lying is wrong, everyone again understands and agrees'. We thus 'assume that whiteness, beauty, and wrongness are characters in the objects and are presenting themselves alike to all of us'. Moreover, the effect of objectifying is reinforced by the fact that 'however widely communities may differ about moral issues, within the limits of a given community practically everyone does agree about them' (p. 108).

Objectification is further strengthened by different authorities. Here, moral education and socialisation carry a particular importance: 'From our earliest childhood we are taught that certain acts *are* right and that others *are* wrong' (ODMI, p. 14; ER, pp. 50–51). The most important factor in individual moral development 'is, all the time, the presence of other persons', such as parents and other authoritative individuals in the child's social environment (ER, p. 51). In upbringing and education, moral issues are emphasised 'in a much higher degree than any other subjective facts', and we are allowed to have our private aesthetic likes, 'but we are not so readily allowed to have our private opinions about right and wrong' (ODMI, p. 14). Second, besides the authority of particular persons, people are very susceptible to conforming to the authority of public opinion, custom and law. They all contribute to giving morality an objective appearance. Third, great moral and religious teachers in human history have played an important role in maintaining the belief in objective moral truths. Fourth, objectification is further supported by the belief in an all-powerful god through which general moral rules appear as the expressions of divine will. Finally, besides these external authorities, there is also the influence of conscience, the internal sense of obligation, which gives moral experience felt authority (ER, p. 51; also ODMI, p. 14). As a result of these factors, people tend to see their moral beliefs as part of the natural and objective order of things, as something independent of their emotions. I will

return to objectification in Chapter 7 when discussing Westermarck's relation to Hume.

The interplay between the individual and the social

The above remarks on the origin and nature of moral emotions, the different ways in which emotions are transmitted from one person to another, the habitual and emotional foundations of social customs and the objectification of emotions as an essentially social phenomenon, illuminate the essential role of social context in Westermarck's thought. In order to better understand these main features of Westermarck's theory of morality, it is useful to look more closely at his conception of the individual-society relationship and Emile Durkheim's influential critique of his work.

As Timothy Stroup (1982a) puts it, the moral emotions are, for Westermarck, 'individual, in the sense that it is only individual people who feel such emotions'. At the same time, 'they are social, because without the social context there would be no scope for moral emotions to develop' and manifest themselves the way they do. Westermarck's description of the 'interplay between individual and society provides an explanation of how private emotions become public morals' and 'how internal feelings are objectified into standards for whole communities'. At the same time, he sought to demonstrate 'how community standards then can in turn be determinative of individual feelings' (p. 173). Moreover, our emotions of moral approval and disapproval exist in the first place because they are part of human social nature and evolved by natural selection to help our ancestors to survive as part of small-scale social communities.

The interaction and tension between the individual and social components of morality become visible in the process where customs and laws are subjected to pressure for change when they no longer, for a sufficient number of people, reflect their moral conceptions. Moral standards may change when 'individuals' or moral 'rebels' begin criticising 'the moral ideas prevalent in the community [. . .] *on the basis of their own individual feelings*' (ODMI, pp. 20, 122, emphasis added). This occurs inevitably because moral emotions, like all human emotions, 'vary in intensity almost indefinitely'. In consequence, 'it may be fairly doubted whether the same mode of conduct ever arouses exactly the same degree of indignation or approval in any two individuals' (ODMI, p. 13; ER, p. 218). The various cognitive factors influencing moral judgements add to this fact. Importantly, these individual emotions gain their force and felt authority from the fact that they possess the same characteristics of disinterestedness, impartiality and generality – in other words, '[t]he emotions from which their opposition against public opinion springs may be, in nature, *exactly similar to the approval or disapproval felt by the society at large*' (ODMI, p. 122, emphasis added). Because customs and laws have ultimately an emotional basis, they also change in relation to moral emotions prevalent in society.

Emile Durkheim was Westermarck's contemporary and main scientific rival. They followed each other's work and dealt with similar topics, especially in

regard to morality, religion, marriage and family (Roos, 2008; Sanderson, 2012; Lagerspetz & Suolinna, 2017). In *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim presents his famous argument that social phenomena, by which he means ways of acting, thinking and feeling that possess external coercive power over the individual, have a very special nature. Social phenomena or 'social facts' constitute a distinct realm of reality that cannot be understood or explained in terms of psychological or biological facts. By psychological explanations, Durkheim means above all explanations in terms of individual mental dispositions and characteristics. Social phenomena could only be explained by other social facts (Durkheim, [1895] 1982).

In his lectures on moral education and his paper 'The Determination of Moral Facts', Durkheim applies these ideas to the problem of origin and nature of moral rules. In his view, morality is a social fact consisting of rules of action that people regard as authoritative and binding on the one hand, and as something to which they desire to adhere on the other. These elements of morality are the result of the self-transcending experiences of attachment to social groups and shared ideas and emotions (Durkheim, [1925] 1961, [1906] 1953). For Durkheim, violation of moral rules inevitably leads to 'sanctions' in the form of 'blame or punishment' inflicted by the social environment. He openly admits that 'I do not as yet know the origin or explanation of this link'. There are also positive sanctions, and acts that conform to the rules of morality 'are praised and those who accomplish them are honoured' (Durkheim, [1906] 1953, pp. 42–44).¹⁷ Durkheim views social sanctions and associated emotional reactions as 'synthetically' related to various acts, which means that their occurrence requires the existence of a pre-existing rule. In addition, moral facts are socially determined so that 'each society has in the main a morality suited to it' and 'all moral systems practised by peoples are a function of the social organization of these peoples, are bound to their social structures and vary with them' (Durkheim, [1906] 1953, pp. 43, 56).¹⁸

Durkheim reviewed the first volume of the *Moral Ideas* immediately after its publication in *L'Année sociologique*. His main criticism was that, according to Westermarck, the sources of morality are 'essentially a very simple matter, consisting merely of very general sentiments that anyone can discover in himself through introspection'. For Westermarck, 'there is no such thing as qualitatively different types of morality, in harmony with equally different social milieux'. Instead, according to Westermarck, 'there is one single morality, engraved upon the congenital nature of man' (Durkheim, [1907] 1979, pp. 43, 50). Durkheim was

17 Westermarck would have considered the latter interpretation as fundamentally flawed, since people are never praised and honoured merely because they conform to moral rules by refraining from doing things that are forbidden. Instead, according to Westermarck, we feel moral approval and hold people as praiseworthy when they act according to a generally acknowledged moral principle in a situation where *most people would probably have acted otherwise*.

18 For further discussion of Durkheim's sociology of morality, see Lukes (1973); Hall (1987); Isambert (1993). Schmaus (2010) provides a detailed account of the relationship between psychology and sociology in Durkheim's oeuvre.

opposed to such an approach for two reasons. First, he argues in his review of Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage* that psychological dispositions such as emotions, sentiments, or instincts are too simple and general to account for the enormous diversity of human social arrangements (Durkheim, 1895, p. 609). I will return to this topic in the next two chapters. Second, it is not uncommon that allegedly universal psychological characteristics 'are either entirely absent in certain social conditions', or else they 'result from collective organization, far from being its basis' (Durkheim, [1895] 1982, pp. 131–132). The fundamental difference between these two early sociologists is summed up by Paul Fauconnet, one of Durkheim's closest disciples and collaborators. He concludes his review of the *Moral Ideas* by emphasising that moral standards and rules cannot originate in the kind of emotional tendencies Westermarck was talking about because history shows that 'human nature is largely unknown, and this is especially because human nature is mostly of social origin and can only be understood when we see it as something social' (Fauconnet, 1910, p. 276).

Echoing Durkheim, many sociologists and anthropologists have assumed that Westermarck was trying to explain social and moral phenomena in terms of individual psychology without paying attention to various social causes and influences. A case in point is provided by Erik Allardt, one of the leading Nordic sociologists in the latter part of the twentieth century. In his view, Westermarck's explanations are 'based on a Darwinistic individual psychology' (Allardt, 2004, p. 232) and he 'interpreted all beliefs and actions as originating in the individual conscience' (Allardt, 2000, p. 304). Thus, Westermarck's reasoning 'was not far from the marginal economists who constructed their view of society on how individuals choose between different options' (Allardt, 1997, p. 29). Similarly, a widely read book on the history of Finnish sociology claims that Westermarck's psychological and biological approach neglects the importance of social sanctions (Haavio-Mannila, 1973, p. 61). In reality, rewards and punishments that emerge spontaneously in the interaction of individuals with certain psychological make-ups are at the very core of Westermarck's theory of morality.

Like Durkheim, Westermarck recognises the binding and coercive character of morality in many ways. Similarly, his analysis of social reality as structured by customs as supra-individual rules of conduct, supported by collective moral disapproval, actually comes close to Durkheim's understanding of social facts (Pipping, 1984, p. 323). However, Westermarck's sociology of morality is characterised above all by the effort to *go beyond* analysing moral standards and rules at the social or collective level, to highlight their sociopsychological and psychological constituents, and to trace the emotional origins all the way back to animal behaviour and, further, to elementary behavioural patterns common to the widest possible range of living organisms.¹⁹ In addition, Westermarck's approach

19 Finnish philosopher Rolf Lagerborg, one of Westermarck's closest friends, notes that Westermarck saw his moral theory as providing a deeper and broader analysis of morality than Durkheim's sociology could offer (Lagerborg, 1951, pp. 185–187). Lagerborg was himself a Durkheimian and

is broader than Durkheim's because he does not link the expressions and manifestations of moral emotions solely with moral rules. While emphasising that morally relevant customs regulate social life in all human societies, Westermarck argues that the processes of modernisation have loosened the traditional connection between customs and morality so that moral emotions are frequently evoked by behaviours that have nothing to do with moral rules or customs.

From Westermarck's point of view, Durkheim and his followers had not paid enough attention to the fact that 'all the different ethnic groups belong to the same animal species and therefore must present resemblances which have a deeper foundation than all differences which are the effects of the social environment'. At the same time, even the social environment itself cannot be fully understood 'without taking into account the mental characteristics of the human species' (HHM I, pp. 17–18). For Westermarck, one of these fundamental psychological characteristics of major sociological relevance is our capacity to share the feelings and emotions of others. Sympathy as a key element of Westermarck's moral and social theory warrants further investigation.

defended his doctoral thesis on the social nature of moral facts in Paris in 1903 with Durkheim as a member of the jury. See Lagerborg (1953) for his account of the rivalry between Westermarck and Durkheim.

4 Sympathy in Westermarck's sociology (I)

Evolutionary roots and expansion

In the previous chapter, we saw how Westermarck uses sympathy to explain the origin and nature of moral emotions. This chapter focuses on the role of sympathy in two other central topics in Westermarck's writings, the evolution of affiliative social behaviour and the circle of persons to whom moral rules are applied. I begin by showing how sympathy serves as the cornerstone of Westermarck's theory of family and kin relationships as the evolutionary origin of human social and emotional bonds. The section also explores Durkheim's critique of Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage*. Next, I reconstruct Westermarck's argument on the expansion of sympathetic emotions beyond close kin, which is linked to his view of society as the 'birthplace' of moral emotions discussed in the previous chapter. I conclude by examining Westermarck's key thesis that the range of sympathy determines the circle of persons on whose behalf we feel moral disapproval – in other words, the limits of moral community.

Sympathy and the theory of family

Like retributive emotions, Westermarck views sympathetic emotions as qualities humans have inherited from our primate ancestors and share with many other species. According to Westermarck, there is ample evidence that sympathy plays a major and constitutive role in animal sociality and cooperation. Among social animals, 'sympathetic resentment is felt towards the enemy of any member of the group', and mutual defence against predators 'undoubtedly involves some degree of sympathetic anger' (ODMI, p. 112). Like humans, group-dwelling animals 'defend each other, help each other in distress and danger; perform various services for each other' (ODMI II, p. 197). He also raises anecdotal cases where sympathetic reactions occur between animals belonging to different species. 'In all animal species which possess altruistic sentiments in some form or other', Westermarck explains, 'we may be sure to find sympathetic resentment as their accompaniment' (ODMI, pp. 111–112; also ER, pp. 98–100).¹

1 It is today well known that affective or emotional empathy, which is equivalent to the kind of emotional sharing discussed by Westermarck, is widespread among social animals (Preston & de Waal, 2002; de Waal, 2008).

Westermarck links the most primordial form of sympathy to maternal care. His view of the evolutionary origin of sympathy comes very close to the argument of contemporary biologists that 'the selection pressure to evolve rapid emotional connectedness likely started in the context of parental care long before our species evolved' (de Waal, 2008, p. 282). In a chapter entitled 'The Origin and Development of the Altruistic Sentiment', Westermarck describes maternal affection as the 'form of the altruistic sentiment which man shares with all mammals and many other animals' (ODMI II, p. 186). The characteristic manifestations of maternal sentiment include a mammalian female that 'is as hostile to the enemy of her young as to her own enemy' (ODMI, p. 112; ER, p. 98). Secondly, in some species sympathy occurs also in connection with paternal attachment which prompts the male to participate in the protection and care of the offspring. Thirdly, and closely related to this, in some species natural selection has favoured attachment and sympathy 'between individuals of different sex, which [induce] male and female to remain with one another beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the offspring' (ODMI II, pp. 189–191). This is what Westermarck calls marriage 'in the natural history sense of the term' (HHM, pp. 6, 19–20; ODMI II, pp. 191, 364).

Because in humans the number of offspring is comparatively small and, on the other hand, the period of infancy and the need for nurture is long, Westermarck suggests that '[p]aternal affection and the instinct which causes male and female to form somewhat durable alliances, are [. . .] useful mental dispositions, which, in all probability, have been acquired through the survival of the fittest' (HHM, pp. 20–21). The evolutionary rationale behind paternal affection and monogamous attachment is that in such circumstances, offspring have better chances to survive and reproduce than they would have if the protection and nurture would be left solely to the mother (HHM, pp. 20–21; ODMI II, pp. 190–191; HHM I, pp. 35–38, 53–54). Thus, for Westermarck, the pair bond has been a fitness-enhancing mechanism, because parental investment is inversely associated with infant mortality (van den Berghe, 1979, pp. 30–31).²

Besides these basic emotional dispositions associated with parenting, Westermarck observes that sympathetic emotions also occur beyond parenthood. Recognising the role of grandparenting in the human family formation, he suggests that the 'same stimuli as call forth kindly emotions towards a person's own children evoke similar emotions towards his grand- and great-grandchildren' (ODMI II, p. 193). Sympathy also manifests itself through children's affection for their parents. Besides generational relationships, 'we find among all existing races of men altruism of the fraternal type, binding together children of the same parents [and] relatives more remotely allied' (ODMI II, pp. 194–195). These emotions provide the basis for Westermarck's theory of human family formation.

2 In *Mothers and Others. The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*, Sarah Hrdy (2009) extends the parental care-model by emphasising the crucial role of cooperative parenting, or the so-called alloparents, in the evolution of emotional empathy.

According to Westermarck, 'family, consisting of parents, children, and often also their next descendants, is a universal institution among existing peoples'. It is also probable that 'among our earliest human ancestors, the family formed, if not the society itself, at least the nucleus of it' (HHM, pp. 14, 42). Westermarck assumed that our early human ancestors lived mainly in small family groups rather than larger communities. This speculative view was partly based on the very limited information that was available at the time about primate social life. Being under the impression that the primates most closely related to humans live in small families, he inferred that this probably applied also to early humans that descended from a common ancestor with these primates (ODMI II, pp. 189–190, 195; HHM, pp. 14–15; HHM I, pp. 36–37, 53–54, 68–69). Even when early humans started forming larger social groups composed of several families, altruistic interactions between close kin continued to stand out from the wider webs of social relations. Westermarck was convinced that there never 'was a time when the family was quite absorbed in the tribe', and related to this, '[e]verywhere we find the tribes or clans composed of several families, the members of each family being more closely connected with one another than with the rest of the tribe' (HHM, pp. 41–42, 50). As we saw above, Westermarck's emotional theory of the family also recognises the spontaneous formation of various extended family arrangements.

Although Westermarck emphasises kinship and family formation as the basis of fundamental emotional and social bonds, his view stresses the interaction between biological, psychological and social influences. Emotional ties between kin develop through social proximity and interaction, and when kinship is 'unsupported by local proximity', it 'loses much of its social force' (ODMI II, p. 202). One can even say that the integrative force of kinship 'is ultimately derived from near relatives' habit of living together' (HHM I, p. 255), because extended close proximity and interaction give rise to feelings of solidarity regardless of biological relatedness. This argument bears a kinship to Westermarck's explanation of incest avoidance. And conversely: 'If in modern society much less importance is attached to kinship than at earlier stages of civilisation, this is largely due to the fact that relatives, except the nearest, have little communication with each other' (ODMI II, p. 204).

Criticism of Westermarck's History of Human Marriage

Durkheim published a long review of *The History of Human Marriage* right after its French translation appeared in 1895. One of Durkheim's main objections was that family and kin relationships display almost infinite historical and cultural variability, and consequently they cannot have the kind of emotional or instinctual foundation Westermarck seemed to be suggesting. Durkheim also argues that Westermarck was unable to demonstrate that paternal attachment, monogamous affection and sexual jealousy – the key emotions shaping and maintaining marriage in Westermarck's naturalistic sense – would have existed in all social and cultural environments. Finally, for Durkheim, Westermarck's whole theoretical

foundation was flawed, because '[t]o rest sociology on Darwinism is to establish it on a hypothesis, which is contrary to all good method'. Instead, according to Durkheim, marriage and kinship are essentially social and legal institutions, based on rules and sanctions, and can only be explained by other social facts (Durkheim, 1895, pp. 608–615, 621–622). Westermarck responded to Durkheim only briefly in an article published in the *Revue internationale de sociologie*. 'Durkheim criticises me for having based my research on an unproven hypothesis', he writes, and this 'objection must sound strange to the ears of anyone who is even slightly aware of the immense progress that biology has made on the basis of Darwinism' (Westermarck, 1897c, p. 452).

Like Durkheim, many later social scientists and historians have accused Westermarck of universalising and defending the conventional monogamous family (Jones, 1980; Coward, 1983; Hawkins, 1997; Lamanna, 2002; Leck, 2018). Westermarck (1934, pp. 333–334) forcefully denied accusations of moral and political motivations, and he was also well aware of the prevalence and importance of extended family networks in preindustrial societies. Most of Westermarck's commentators have neglected his extensive examination of various demographic, economic, social and psychological factors favouring the different forms of marriage. Since the early 1900s, Westermarck distinguished more clearly between the natural-historical view of marriage and marriage as a 'social institution'. In the latter sense, marriage is a 'union regulated by custom or law' (ODMI II, p. 364), or, according to his full definition, 'a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognised by custom or law', involving various rights and obligations between the parties involved and between parents and children (HHM I, p. 26). The link between Westermarck's theory of morality and theory of marriage shows that the wide variety of rules and customs regulating different marriage practices 'are essentially expressions of moral feelings' (ODMI II, p. 364). As we shall see in the next chapter, Westermarck also addressed the issue raised by Durkheim about why it is that conjugal relations are subjected to social and moral regulation in the first place.

Based on his historical and cross-cultural comparisons, Westermarck views monogamy and polygyny (marriage between one man and two or more women) as the most common forms of marriage. Monogamy is, according to Westermarck, the only form of marriage that is allowed in all known societies and that always occurs side by side with other forms of marriage. In countries and communities where polygyny is allowed, it is usually practiced only by some part of the population. Polyandry, marriage between one woman and multiple men, is a very rare arrangement, and is usually a response to exceptional demographic and economic circumstances. Because small-scale hunter-gatherer societies are generally monogamous, Westermarck concluded, supported by his Darwinian reasoning, that some sort of pair bond constituted also the earliest form of human marriage. The first edition of *The History of Human Marriage* (1891) emphasises the prevalence of monogamous marriage significantly more than the expanded version of the book that appeared thirty years later. However, the treatment of the causes of monogamy and polygyny is very similar in these works.

For Westermarck, key factors promoting monogamy are a balanced sex-ratio, economic and social equality, resource barriers to keep several wives and female jealousy. Monogamy is also supported by the fact that, especially in hunter-gatherer societies, 'a married woman often occupies a respected and influential position, and the relations between man and wife may be of very tender character' (HHM III, pp. 84–86, 89, 97–101). Finally, Westermarck did not regard falling in love with one person as a recent cultural construct, but as a species-typical human characteristic with deep biological foundation. And 'when love implies sympathy and affection arising from mental qualities', it 'leads to a monogamy that is enduring' (HHM III, pp. 101–104).

The other main form of marriage, polygyny, is greatly influenced by an unbalanced sex-ratio in favour of women and the accumulation and unequal distribution of wealth. Wars have also played a role in enabling polygyny due to increased male mortality. According to Westermarck, all these phenomena are, to a large extent, consequences of the Neolithic revolution. When these enabling conditions exist, polygyny is, firstly, linked to certain psychological factors. Popular religious beliefs encourage abstinence from sexual intercourse during menstruation, pregnancy and, in varying degrees, after childbirth. Another cause is male attraction to 'female youth and beauty' and the decrease in sexual interest within long-term relationships (HHM III, pp. 52, 64–67, 70, 74). Besides sexual motives, the practice of polygyny is closely related to economic and social circumstances, since family members may serve as a work-force and in many societies a large family increases men's social status (HHM III, pp. 74–76, 80, 82). While these socioeconomic and psychological factors tend to promote polygyny, Westermarck argues that the processes of modernisation in 'the higher forms of civilization' correlate with the spread of monogamy. This is because religious reasons for refraining from sex at certain times have disappeared, a large family has lost its economic and social significance, and the inducements and necessities for women to consent to polygyny have diminished (HHM III, pp. 104–105).

Reciprocity and the evolution of moral emotions

Westermarck links the expansion of sympathy beyond small family groups to 'the formation of larger communities' (ODMI II, p. 195) and to circumstances where 'sociality, being an advantage to man, became his habit' (ODMI, p. 113). Besides the forms of sympathy discussed above, humans have altruistic sentiment and sympathetic emotions 'binding together [...] relatives more remotely allied, and, generally, members of the same social unit' (ODMI II, pp. 194–195). For Westermarck, the expanding circle of sympathy beyond close kin can be explained by Darwinian benefits, because '[l]iving together in larger groups men could resist the dangers of life and defend themselves much better than when solitary' (ODMI II, p. 196). This is not necessarily or even primarily a matter of defending against other human groups, since Westermarck assumed that simple hunter-gatherer societies were (and are) usually relatively

peaceable.³ In Westermarck's theory of the evolution of human society, the extension of small family groups may have taken place in two different ways. First, there is adhesion in which other families or individuals unite with the group from the outside. Second, there is a 'natural growth' which Westermarck regarded as the common mode of social expansion. Here, too, biological kinship plays a key role because 'the children, instead of separating from their parents, may have remained with them and increased the group by forming new families themselves' (ODMI II, pp. 195–196).

In evolutionary behavioural sciences, the basic explanatory mechanisms for the evolution of altruistic behaviour are the degree of genetic relatedness and different forms of reciprocity (Hamilton, 1964, 1996; Trivers, 1971, 2002, 2006; Alexander, 1987).⁴ From this perspective, it is noteworthy that Westermarck emphasises biological kinship and reciprocity as the most important factors underlying the evolution and spread of sympathetic emotions. The importance of what we would now call reciprocal altruism is reflected in the fact that in larger social groups, 'the members of the group display a feeling of affection for each other – *defend each other; help each other in distress and danger; perform various services for each other*' (ODMI II, p. 197, emphasis added). Cooperation based on reciprocity is the underlying principle for more wide-ranging sympathy to arise, because '[s]ocial affection presupposes reciprocity'. For Westermarck, 'social affection is itself essentially retributive', that is, 'it is not only a friendly sentiment towards another individual, but towards an individual who is conceived of as a friend' (ODMI, p. 94). Consequently, social affection and sympathetic emotions are 'not only greatly increased by reciprocity of feeling, but could never have come into existence without such reciprocity' (ODMI II, p. 198). These emotional tendencies bind individuals into society, and in small-scale societies, 'all the members of the community are united with one another by common interests and common feelings' (ODMI, p. 113).

Westermarck's account of the evolution of sympathy in larger groups is based on the view of natural selection operating at the level of individuals. As we saw in Chapter 3, he emphasises that retributive emotions have evolved through natural selection because they have a 'tendency to promote the interests of the individuals

3 See HHM, pp. 465–466, 505; ODMI II, pp. 389–390; ODMI, pp. 333–335; Westermarck (1913). Westermarck's view of warfare in foraging societies was reinforced by a comparative study on the anthropology of war conducted by his Finnish disciple Rudolf Holsti. Holsti chose the topic and prepared his doctoral thesis *The Relation of War to the Origin of the State* (1913) under Westermarck's guidance, employing the holdings of the British Library. As summarised by Joan Vincent (1990), '[f]ar from warfare being universal in simple societies, [Holsti] found a lack of indiscriminate slaughter, low death rates from war, the killing only of adult males directly involved in combat, institutionalized inviolability of go-betweens or messengers between potentially hostile groups, and the prevalence of peace making and treaty keeping' (p. 91). Douglas Fry (2009) addresses contemporary anthropological debates on these issues.

4 For a comprehensive review of kin altruism and reciprocity models in the evolutionary research on human altruism and cooperation, see West, Griffin & Gardner (2007); West, El Mouden & Gardner (2011); Kappeler & van Schaik (2006); Kurzban, Burton-Chellew & West (2015).

who feel them' (ODMI, p. 108). Similarly, when discussing the evolution of sympathetic emotions in larger social groups, Westermarck suggests that in ancestral environments, the members of the same community are characterised by 'the solidarity of interests'. They have 'enjoyments in common', 'the same enemies to resist, the same dangers to encounter, the same difficulties to overcome' (ODMI II, p. 197). These conditions of close-knit social groups provide also the basis for the evolution of moral emotions. Because in such environments the interests of the individual and the group were largely harmonious, natural selection could favour disinterested and impartial retributive emotions which were felt generally in the community.

Westermarck clearly acknowledged the potential conflicts between the interests of the individual and the interests of the group. The possibility of conflict in all human affairs is already inherent in Westermarck's theory of *retributive emotions*. However, for Westermarck, intergroup conflicts seldom arose in environments where the moral emotions emerged, because 'acts which are beneficial to the agent are at the same time beneficial to his companions, and the distinction between ego and alter loses much of its importance' (ODMI II, p. 197). Also more generally, it was typical of Westermarck that in his analysis of human action he did not operate on the simplistic distinction between egoism and altruism. Instead, he argues that 'in the motives of actions it is impossible to draw any sharp limit between the interests of self and the interests of others'. Likewise, '[i]t is a mistake to suppose that every act has but one motive', and 'just as the motives of an act, so also the effects of it tend to be both egoistic and altruistic' (ER, pp. 26–27).

These views are reflected in Westermarck's analysis of reciprocity in small-scale societies. When we 'look below the surface', we see that people 'may be induced to do good to their fellow-creatures not only by kindly feelings towards them, but by egoistic motives' (ODMI, p. 560). Thus,

The Basutos say that 'the knife that is lent does not return alone to its master' – a kindness is never thrown away. Of the Asiniboin, a Siouan tribe, Mr. Dorsey states that 'nothing is given except with a view to a gift in return'. [...] In his description of the Greenlanders, Dr. Nansen observes that all the small communities depend for their existence on the law of mutual assistance, on the principle of common suffering and common enjoyment. 'A hard life has taught the Eskimo that even if he is a skillful hunter and can, as a rule, manage to hold his own well enough, there may come times when, without the help of his fellows, he would have to succumb. It is better, therefore, for him to help in his turn'. *That similar considerations largely lie at the bottom of the custom of mutual aid and charity both in uncivilised and more advanced communities, we may assume from the experience of human nature which we have acquired at home.* And such motives must be particularly active in a society the members of which are so dependent on each other's services and return-services.

(ODMI, p. 560, emphasis added and footnotes removed)

In addition to kinship and reciprocity, Westermarck recognises that 'the members of the same social unit are tied to each other with various bonds of a distinctly human character'. These factors of social integration include 'customs, laws, institutions, magic or religious ceremonies and beliefs, or notions of a common descent' (ODMI II, p. 198). It is noteworthy that it is only after his account of kinship, reciprocity, local proximity and ties formed by marriage that Westermarck adds that also 'common worship may tie people together into social union'. However, because 'a religious community generally coincides with a community of another kind', he emphasises that it is 'impossible exactly to distinguish the social influence of the common religion from that exercised by' other integrating factors. In any case, for Westermarck anthropologists of the day had over-emphasised 'the importance of the religious bond, or at least of the totem bond' (ODMI II, pp. 209–210). Westermarck did not marginalise the role of shared religious beliefs and sentiments for social integration, but they were not a primary component. This is yet another difference between Westermarck and Durkheim, whose last major work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* ([1912] 1995), claims that totemistic beliefs and collective effervescence associated with religious rituals are the very foundation of primitive sociality.

The expanding circle of morality

One of the key features of Westermarck's moral theory is that 'the range of the moral emotions varies with the range of the altruistic sentiment' (ER, p. 200; see also ODMI II, pp. 743–744). This means that the scope of sympathy defines the circle of people within which the infliction of injury is prohibited. This is reflected in the simple but crucial fact that acts against people or other living beings towards which one does not feel sympathy do not give rise to moral indignation. Due to this simple reason, the circle of moral concern has been historically restricted to the members of the same community:

Primitive peoples carefully distinguish between an act of homicide committed within their own community and one where the victim is a stranger: while the former is in ordinary circumstances disapproved of, the latter is in most cases allowed. [...] And the same holds true of theft and lying and the infliction of other injuries. Apart from the privileges granted to guests, which are always of very short duration, a stranger is in early society devoid of all rights. And the same is the case not only among savages but among nations of archaic culture as well.

(ER, p. 197; also ODMI II, p. 743)

Following this logic, Westermarck suggests that 'the expansion of the moral rules' results from 'the widening of the altruistic sentiment'. What lies behind this process, and the expansion of the 'moral community', is the growth in the size of social units and an 'increased intercourse between different societies' (ER, pp. 200, 202–203). As a result, we can see that 'the nation has taken the place of

the tribe, and that the circle of persons within which the infliction of injuries is prohibited has extended accordingly' (ODMI II, p. 743; ER, p. 197). Although Westermarck considered that there are *innate individual differences* in the human tendency to sympathise, he clearly believed that the scope of sympathy is largely determined by historical conditions and social learning; it is 'acquired, not innate' (Westermarck, 1897a, p. 123).

It is central to Westermarck's overall argument that the expansion of sympathy could be explained by biological evolution only to the level of small-scale hunter-gatherer societies. After this, the widening of sympathetic emotions does not arise from any kind of process of natural selection, but rather is a by-product of the expansion of the social units and the increasing peaceful social interactions. In other words, once the psychological structures of emotionally modern humans were in existence, they could manifest themselves in wider contexts. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin also addresses the issue of the widening of the circle of sympathy. It began with parent and child and moved outward from the family and close kin to the local community, the nation, and finally the whole of humankind and even to other species (White, 2013, p. 127). However, it is worth noting how radically different Westermarck's theory is from Darwin's. He differs from Darwin not only by rejecting group selection ideas, but also by discarding the role of reason in the process.

As noted in Chapter 2, Darwin believes that the origin and spread of moral qualities cannot be explained with natural selection operating at the level of individuals. This concerns especially emotional dispositions motivating altruistic behaviour, which give only 'a slight or no advantage to each individual man and his children over the other men of the same tribe'. It is rather that the most sympathetic and altruistic individuals who are willing to risk their lives on behalf of others would likely have fewer offspring than the selfish members of the group. However, for Darwin, this evolutionary puzzle could be solved if natural selection also takes place between groups or communities. Despite the individual costs, moral qualities would 'certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over the other'. Cooperative and altruistic groups 'would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection'. As human communities have always supplanted one another, 'the social and moral qualities would tend slowly to advance and be diffused throughout the world' (Darwin, [1871] 1981, pp. 162–163, 166).⁵ In crucial respects, Darwin regards the expansion of sympathy as a rational phenomenon. 'As man advances in civilisation and small tribes are united into larger communities', he concludes, '*the simplest reason* would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all

5 For a discussion on the role of community or group selection in Darwin's account of morality, see Richards (1987, pp. 207–217; 2003); Ruse (1980, pp. 626–628); Borrello (2010, pp. 13–14). Darwin employed the idea of group selection originally in the *Origin of Species* when exploring the sterile castes of social insect colonies. In this connection, however, Darwin emphasised the biological kinship of the community (Dugatkin, 2006).

the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him'. After this, 'there is only an artificial barrier', by which Darwin means suspicion towards different appearance and habits, 'to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races' (Darwin, [1871] 1981, pp. 100–101, 103, emphasis added).

At the time of the *Moral Ideas*, Westermarck firmly believed in the continuing expansion of human sympathies. He predicts that 'the altruistic sentiment will continue to expand', 'those moral commandments which are based on it will undergo a corresponding expansion' (ODMI II, p. 746) and 'the notion of a human brotherhood will receive more support from the actual feelings of mankind than it does at present' (ODMI II, p. 228). At the same time, despite the optimistic rhetoric, Westermarck emphasises that the 'idea that one's own people is the best is very deep-rooted in human nature' (ER, p. 201; also ODMI II, pp. 170–174). Moreover, as people 'generally are fond of that to which they are used or which is their own, they are also naturally apt to have likings for other individuals whose habits or ideas are similar to theirs'. Above all, the scope of sympathy is narrowed by social isolation, differences in appearance, language, habits and customs, as well as the human tendency towards suspicion and enmity (ODMI II, pp. 198, 227–228). In the early 1930s, Westermarck writes that in-group favouritism manifests itself especially in the attitudes towards war, national aggressiveness and patriotism (ER, p. 199).⁶

The same causes that narrow the sphere of sympathy-based moral disapproval between human communities also create intra-societal differences in its manifestation. For example, '[w]hen a social unit is composed of loosely connected sub-groups, the intercourse between members of different sub-groups resembles in many respects that between foreigners'. Similarly, in societies where class distinctions and conflicting interests are powerful, the different classes 'have often little sympathy for each other'. This in turn leads to the deviating occurrences of moral emotions (ODMI II, p. 129). The fact that moral emotions are displayed asymmetrically in social hierarchy can be seen in that 'persons belonging to a higher class are naturally apt to sympathise more with their equals than with their inferiors'. As a result, they show more indignation when their peer suffers injury than when a similar injury is inflicted on someone perceived as inferior. However, Westermarck believes that in a 'progressive society', 'different classes gradually draw nearer to each other. The once all-powerful class loses much of its exclusiveness, as well as of its importance and influence. Sympathy expands' (ODMI, p. 433).

6 Westermarck discusses patriotism in ODMI II, pp. 166–185.

5 Sympathy in Westermarck's sociology (II)

The genesis and maintenance of moral norms

One of the main questions in Westermarck's ethics concerns the emotional foundations of moral norms. His treatment of the topic is based on two main pillars: sympathy and emotional aversion. This chapter continues to examine the role of sympathy in Westermarck's moral and social theory by looking at his account of the relationship between sympathy and certain fundamental moral rules that he interpreted as human universals. We have seen in the two previous chapters how Westermarck outlined a theory on the evolutionary origin of moral emotions. The present chapter shows how, according to Westermarck, these emotions play a vital role both in the process of formation of moral norms and in how these social institutions are upheld.

Recent commentators have argued that Westermarck failed to address this key question. Lagerspetz (2013) notes that although 'Westermarck believes that moral emotions give rise to mores and customs', 'he is not very specific about the process or about the role of society in it' (p. 920). According to Kronqvist (2014), Westermarck does not present a theory of 'how expressed approval or disapproval are turned into customs that then take the shape of moral commandments' (p. 132). We discussed some aspects of these issues in Chapter 3 when considering Westermarck's views on social customs and the relationship between the individual and the social. In order to clarify this topic further, this chapter continues to explore the role of society in Westermarck's thought. I begin by locating and analysing the basic components of Westermarck's theory of moral norms. I then illustrate Westermarck's account through his analysis of moral attitudes to the treatment of other people, actions affecting primarily the agent's own well-being and human behaviour towards the dead and gods. Finally, I discuss Westermarck's examination of the main underlying causes of variations in moral practices across cultures.

The structure of Westermarck's theory of sympathy and moral norms

The gist of Westermarck's position is that sympathetic emotions that arise via bodily, situational and verbal cues are the main source of fundamental moral norms and rules structuring and regulating interactions between human beings. Simply put, there are many forms of action that cause us to feel hostile towards the

agent even though we personally are not objects of those acts. They evoke moral disapproval because we vicariously experience negative feelings when observing such interactions between others. These emotional responses are crucial for Westermarck's explanation of the emergence and maintenance of moral norms.

In the *Moral Ideas*, Westermarck discusses several rules of conduct whose existence he traces specifically and primarily to the human capacity for sympathy. It should be stressed that in all these instances, he provides various supplementary explanations as well. However, since my intention is to demonstrate the crucial role sympathy plays in Westermarck's thought, I shall not examine these other factors here. Because the range of sympathy defines the limits of moral community, there has been great variation in the circle of people to whom these rules are applied. He was also well aware that similar moral rules may vary in their specific cultural-contextual details. However, according to Westermarck, there are no societies known in which the following classes of acts do not arouse moral disapproval: homicide and infliction of physical harm and injury; theft; offences against honour and reputation; impoliteness; lying and cheating; failure to reciprocate altruistic action in a social relationship where this is expected; the neglect of basic parental duties and self-neglect and self-harm. In addition, sympathy is involved in influencing the rules concerning the treatment of the dead and practices regulating human behaviour towards gods. No matter how deficient Westermarck's ethnological data may be, his findings are very much in line with later anthropological comparisons. As summed up by Christopher Boehm (2012),

even though certain types of moral beliefs can vary considerably (and sometimes dramatically) between cultures, all human groups frown on, make pronouncements against, and punish the following: murder, undue use of authority, cheating that harms group cooperation, major lying, theft and socially disruptive sexual behavior.

(p. 34)¹

Westermarck's understanding of the foundations of moral norms is based on the analysis of two kinds of emotional responses. In the first place, the recipient of certain forms of action responds with painful feelings and disapproval towards the agent. In many cases Westermarck outlines both proximate psychological causes and ultimate evolutionary reasons for these reactions. However, the fact that the object of an act reacts in a certain way is not enough for moral norms to develop. To this, one must add what could be called the *audience effect* – other people who observe or hear about the action must sympathise with the person wronged and feel indignation towards the offender. It is in this sense that Westermarck construes moral emotions as 'public emotions' which given behaviours have a tendency to arouse in a given community. In this way, society, in a very concrete sense of the term, is an inseparable part of Westermarck's moral and

1 For further discussion of human universals, see Brown (1991); Kappeler & Silk (2010).

social theory, representing simply the continuous presence of other people as spectators of human actions and interactions. In addition to these building blocks, moral rules and norms are supported and reinforced by their habitual basis and the human tendency to disapprove of actions that deviate from established behavioural expectations.

This account provides a deceptively simple and clear description of how certain basic moral rules originate and how they are continuously maintained by human emotions. It succeeds in shedding light on the psychological and social causes behind some of the most fundamental aspects of the social world that are well known to exist but seldom explicated by sociologists and anthropologists. These social regularities are ultimately rooted in the simple fact that, according to Westermarck, humans are inherently emotional and social beings whose interactions have always, in one way or another, interested spectators. To illustrate Westermarck's approach, let us now take a closer look at how his theory of the sympathy-based moral norms manifests itself in the *Moral Ideas*.

Killing and other forms of harming

Westermarck recognises that all human groups have prohibitions against harming other members of the same community. In his view, 'it seems extremely probable that *sympathetic resentment felt on account of the injury suffered by the victim* has from the beginning been a potent cause of the condemnation of homicide' (ODMI, p. 331, emphasis added). Because people equally sympathise with the bereaved, homicide is also condemned 'as an injury inflicted upon the survivors. It deprived [the victim's] friends of his company, his family and community of a useful member' (ODMI, pp. 372–373). Similarly, prohibitions against the infliction of bodily injuries stem from 'the principle of sympathetic resentment', especially because a violent 'interference with another person's body not only causes physical pain but commonly entails disgrace upon the sufferer' (ODMI, p. 524). Westermarck postulates that the differences in degrees of sympathy have an effect also on the moral evaluation of feticide and infanticide: 'Considering that the same degree of sympathy cannot be felt with regard to a child not yet born as with regard to an infant, it is not surprising to find that feticide is practiced without objection even by some peoples who never commit infanticide' (ODMI, pp. 413–414).

Theft

In Westermarck's interpretation, some notion of ownership is recognised in all known human societies. According to his definition, '[t]he right of property implies that a certain person or certain persons are recognized as having a right to the exclusive disposal of a certain thing'. This suggests not only that the owner 'is allowed, at least within certain limits, to use or deal with it at his discretion, but also that other persons are forbidden to prevent him from using or dealing with it in any manner he is entitled to' (ODMI II, p. 1). Westermarck's argument begins with an outline of the evolutionary origins of possessive behaviours. In his view,

the psychological basis of ownership lies in the 'desire in the owner to keep and dispose of what he has appropriated or produced' and in the related tendency to resist its abstraction. Because of the survival value of such behaviours, the evolutionary roots of appropriation run 'deep not only in human but in animal nature'. Examples of possessive behaviours in animals include the defence of territory, nest site or prey. As a result of these tendencies, both in human and animals, 'it is dangerous for an individual to try to seize anything held by another of about equal strength' (ODMI II, p. 51).

In early human communities characterised as being economically egalitarian, these facts 'naturally led to the habit of leaving each in possession of whatever he had attained'. After this social habit was established, it 'was further strengthened by various circumstances, all of which tended to make interference with other persons' possessions the subject of moral censure'. One of the key reasons for the emergence of respect of property as a moral norm is the manifestations of sympathetic retributive emotions. In other words, '[r]esentment is felt not only by him who is deprived of his possession, but by others on his behalf'. The social recognition of the claim to property becomes visible, not merely by the 'fact that individuals are in actual possession of certain objects', but also in 'the public disapproval of acts by which they are deprived of such possession'. Even when codified as legal rights, these practices are essentially expressions of moral emotions (ODMI II, pp. 1, 51–52).

Westermarck highlights six widely recognised means for acquiring property, each of which is supported by sympathetic emotions. First, one can acquire property by taking possession of something that at the moment belongs to nobody. Second, one can acquire property by keeping possession of what one has occupied for a certain length of time. Third, one has generally a right to the products of one's labour. This stems from the fact that '[n]ot only do exertions in producing an object make the producer desirous to keep it and to have the exclusive disposal of it, but an encroachment upon the fruit of his labour arouses sympathetic resentment in outsiders, who feel that an effort deserves its reward'. Fourth, one can acquire property by transfer from a prior owner. This is possible because 'in ordinary circumstances, there would be no moral disapproval of a voluntary transfer of property to another person'. Fifth, one can acquire property by inheritance. Finally, ownership in a thing may directly follow from ownership in another thing, for example, the owner of a cow is generally regarded as the owner of her calf, the owner of a tree as the owner of its fruits, and so forth (ODMI II, pp. 35–50, 52–53). Inheritance and the ownership following from ownership in another object are made possible by moral disapproval towards a person who attempts to deprive someone of these rights.

Offences against honour and reputation

According to Westermarck, the offensiveness of many behaviours stems from a natural human desire to be respected by others and dislike of being looked down upon. Such acts and omissions are, above all, associated with insults against

honour and good name (ODMI II, p. 137). Westermarck explains that a 'person's "self-feeling" may be violated in innumerable ways, by words and deeds' (ODMI II, p. 146). Its violation is also 'an extremely common and powerful incentive to resentment'. Indeed, '[n]othing more easily rouses in us anger and a desire for retaliation, nothing is more difficult to forgive, than an act which indicates contempt, or disregard of our feelings' (ODMI, pp. 38–39).

As a result of these tendencies, people are commonly obliged to recognise the 'honour' of their fellows, defined by Westermarck 'as the moral worth [a person] possesses in the eyes of the society of which he is a member'. Other people are supposed 'to acknowledge this worth and, especially, not to detract from it by imputing him, on insufficient grounds, such behaviour as is generally considered degrading'. Moreover, the rules of conduct related to honour and reputation are 'contained in the more comprehensive duty of showing deference, in words and actions, for his feeling of self-regarding pride' (ODMI II, pp. 137–138).

These desires and emotions give rise to rules and laws prohibiting offences against honour because '[l]ike other injuries, an insult not only affects the feelings of the victim, but arouses sympathetic resentment in outsiders, and is consequently disapproved of as wrong'. All of this has much to do with the 'rules of politeness and good manners'. Even though associated customary practices 'vary indefinitely in detail', Westermarck emphasises that '[t]here is no people on earth which does not recognize some rules of politeness' (ODMI II, pp. 140, 146). It is noteworthy that in Westermarck's interpretation politeness is not a virtue but a duty. This means that politeness, in this elementary sense of the term, is not something that is regarded praiseworthy but that the lack of it has a tendency to arouse moral disapproval both in the person concerned and his or her fellow humans (ODMI II, p. 146). Westermarck does not discuss the various subtle forms of politeness and good manners going beyond the obligatory – that is, the basic level of politeness expected from anyone in a given society in similar circumstances. However, for Westermarck, such social conventions are not emotionally charged moral customs or norms, because their breach or omission does not usually arouse moral disapproval.

Lying and cheating

Another social regularity recognised by Westermarck is that human social interaction involves expectations regarding truthfulness in speech and action. In Westermarck's definition, the regard for truth implies that 'we ought to abstain from lying, that is, a willful representation of facts, by word or deed, with the intention of producing a false belief'. It is closely associated with keeping one's promise, all of which 'seem to be universally recognized, though the censure passed on the transgressor varies extremely in degree' (ODMI II, p. 72). First, Westermarck presents an individual psychological explanation for the indignation elicited by falsehood and deception. 'Curiosity, or the love of truth' is 'an ultimate fact in the human frame', and we are not 'injured by a deception merely because we like to know the truth, but, chiefly, because it is of much importance for us that we should

know it'. The evolutionary rationale for these psychological tendencies is that '[o]ur conduct is based upon our ideas; hence the erroneous notion as regards some fact in the past, present, or future, which is produced by a lie or false promise, may lead to unforeseen events detrimental to our interests'. Again, as in previous instances, the primary source of moral norms concerning truthfulness is traced to the emotional reactions of a social environment. In other words, 'he who tells a lie, or who breaks a promise, generally commits an injury against another person. His act consequently calls forth sympathetic resentment, and becomes an object of moral censure' (ODMI II, pp. 109–110).

Reciprocity as a moral obligation

Westermarck distinguishes reciprocity as an elementary feature of human sociality. Besides being a universal practice based on our retributive emotions that seek punishment or reward, he analyses reciprocity as a moral norm that arises from, and is supported by, sympathy and moral emotions. 'To requite a benefit, or to be grateful to him who bestows it', he writes, 'is probably everywhere, at least under certain circumstances, regarded as a duty' (ODMI II, p. 155). The binding force of reciprocity originates in the fact that it is not only 'practiced habitually', but also 'because a failure to afford it will call forth sympathetic resentment on behalf of the sufferer' (ODMI, pp. 559–560). More specifically, 'among beings capable of feeling moral emotions *the general disposition to be kind to a benefactor will inevitably lead to the notion that ungrateful behaviour is wrong*' (ODMI II, p. 166, emphasis added). To explain why this is so, Westermarck looks at the benefactor's emotions on the one hand, and spectators' two kinds of sympathetic reactions on the other. The first suggests that the lack of gratitude 'is offensive to the benefactor'. This in turn 'tends to evoke in the bystander sympathetic resentment towards the offender'. In addition, the spectator's moral disapproval 'is much increased by the retributive kindness which he is apt to feel, sympathetically, towards the benefactor'. The bystander wants to see the benefactor's 'kindness rewarded; and he is shocked by the absence of a similar desire in the very person who may be naturally expected to feel it more strongly than anybody else' (ODMI II, p. 166).

Parental care

As anthropologist Bernard Chapais (2008) points out, 'Westermarck reasoned that behaviors that are naturally avoided – mating with a close kin, having sex with another species, or killing one's father – should give rise to *proscriptive* rules against incest, bestiality, and parricide'. These behaviours arouse vicarious negative feelings when we imagine or observe such interactions between others. All this relates to parental care because Westermarck's reasoning 'applies equally well to social interactions which are naturally felt as *positive*'. The case in point is that altruistic interactions between close kin are accompanied with corresponding *prescriptive* rules (pp. 84–86).

Customs associated with parental care serve in Westermarck's writings as paradigmatic examples of how 'instincts give rise not only to habits but also to rules of custom, or institutions'. He explains that [s]ocial beings endowed with 'instincts and sentiments associated to pair bond and parental care 'would feel moral resentment against a man who forsakes the woman with whom he has conjugal intercourse and the offspring resulting from it' (HHM I, p. 71). In other words, because the great majority of people respond negatively to an abusive or neglectful father *on the basis of their own evolved emotional dispositions*, there spontaneously arise moral rules that condemn such actions and omissions.

The role of society and sympathy becomes more visible in Westermarck's treatment of the subject in the *Moral Ideas*: 'If a man leaves his wife and children without protection and support, *the other members of the community will sympathise with them, and feel resentment towards the neglectful husband and father*'. This person is viewed 'as the cause of their suffering, because he omitted to do what other men in his position would have done'. Due to our basic emotional dispositions and capacity for sympathetic identification, this man's 'conduct will be repulsive to everyone who himself possess those sentiments of which he proves destitute' (ODMI, p. 533, emphasis added).² The same seems to apply to maternal care. As Chapais (2008) puts it,

maternal caretaking is a major interactional regularity throughout the primate order and well beyond it. Applying Westermarck's argument, one would expect maternal caretaking to have given rise to normative rules of conduct – whether they are legally enforced or merely consensual – that prescribe maternal care and to other rules that prohibit behaviors contravening the principle of maternal care (for example, rules about child abuse).

(p. 86)

Self-neglect and self-harm

In the cases where one person physically or psychologically harms another, the spectators' sympathies are intuitively appealing and easy to understand, particularly when considering the altruistic overtones of Westermarck's conception of sympathy. But how does sympathy relate to attitudes towards self-injury? Another

2 Westermarck's theory of the social regulation of parental care is clearly indebted to Adam Smith's account of close kin relationships. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith suggests that we generally expect that 'a suitable degree of affection should take place among' close relatives. Similarly, we are shocked by the lack of such affection. As a consequence, '[t]he general rule is established, that persons related to one another in a certain degree, ought always to be affected towards one another in a certain manner, and that there is always the highest impropriety, and sometimes even a sort of impiety, in their being affected in a different manner'. This shows that a 'parent without parental tenderness, a child devoid of all filial reverence, appear monsters, the objects, not of hatred only, but of horror' (TMS, p. 220). However, Westermarck disagreed with the details of Smith's view on the origin of family affection (see ODMI, p. 111).

universal feature of the human condition recognised by Westermarck is that humans have duties towards themselves. He discusses behaviours affecting principally an agent's own well-being under the heading of 'self-regarding duties'. Westermarck's analysis of duty as a social phenomenon suggests that a failure to do what is in a given society or social group regarded as one's duty has a tendency to arouse moral disapproval in other people. An essential feature of self-regarding duties is that they are 'similar in kind to those which [people] owe to their fellow-creatures' (ODMI II, p. 265). By and large,

They are not only forbidden to take their own lives, but are also in some measure considered to be under an obligation to support their existence, to take care of their bodies, to preserve a certain amount of personal freedom, not to waste their property, to exhibit self-respect, and, in general, to promote their own happiness.

(ODMI II, p. 265)

These moral obligations originate, in the first place, from the fact that 'no mode of conduct is exclusively self-regarding'. No human individual 'is an entirely isolated being, hence anything which immediately affects a person's own welfare affects at the same, in some degree, the welfare of other individuals'. This implies that *the negligence of self-regarding duties* tends to elicit moral disapproval in others because they sympathise with those who are affected by the agent's conduct. Secondly, sympathy influences the moral evaluation of self-inflicted harm because the person is seen as if divided into two parts, as the agent and the object of action. Thus, '*the injury committed may excite sympathetic resentment towards the agent, although the victim of it is his own self*' (ODMI II, p. 266, emphases added). Westermarck strongly emphasises the historical and cultural variation in attitudes towards suicide, but in his view, both of these forms of sympathy are intrinsically linked to the moral condemnation of suicide (ODMI II, pp. 261–263).

At the same time, the social importance of these moral expectations is much lesser than other-regarding duties. Referring to the first form of sympathy discussed above, Westermarck argues that this is because the influence self-regarding duties 'exercise upon other persons' welfare is generally too remote to attract much attention'. Moreover, regarding the second form of sympathy, the 'compassion which we are apt to feel for the victim of an injury is naturally lessened by the fact that it is self-inflicted' (ODMI II, pp. 265, 267).

Attitudes towards the dead and the treatment of gods

Sympathy also plays a key role in Westermarck's examination of the relations between the living and the dead. His starting point is that '[t]here is a general tendency in the human mind to assume that what has existed still exists and will exist'. Death commonly involves beliefs about the disembodied soul having more or less 'the same mental capacities as its owner possessed during his lifetime'.

The soul 'can see and hear and think, it has human passions and a human will, and it has the power to influence the living for evil or for good'. For Westermarck, such conceptions 'determine the relations between the living and the dead' (ODMI II, pp. 515–516).

Like basic self-directed duties, Westermarck emphasises that duties to the dead are similar to those people owe to their fellow human beings. According to common beliefs, one must avoid doing anything which might hurt the soul. Like living persons, 'the dead are sensitive to insults and fond of praise; hence respect must be shown for their honour and self-regarding pride'. Since the dead are generally regarded as sentient beings, customary rules regarding their treatment are 'to a considerable extent based on the feeling of sympathetic resentment'. To put it more clearly, for Westermarck attitudes towards the dead are, first and foremost, based on people's sympathy with the potential indignation of a mistreated soul. There are also widespread beliefs that the dead should be kept pleased because they are capable of influencing the living either favourably or adversely (ODMI II, pp. 516–517, 520, 528–529). It is thus a 'mixture of sympathy and fear which is at the bottom of the duties to the dead' (ODMI II, p. 548).

Finally, according to Westermarck, sympathy is one factor, although not the main factor, shaping certain key aspects of religious behaviour. Again, as with duties to the self and to the dead, human conduct towards gods 'is in many respects determined by considerations similar to those which regulate his conduct towards his fellow men' (ODMI II, p. 602). Even though related social customs vary substantially in content, Westermarck highlights several connecting threads in religious practices. They are ultimately based on the fact that 'man attributes to his gods a variety of human qualities' (ODMI II, p. 602). First of all, in normal circumstances it is prohibited to injure or kill gods. Second, their existence and comfort must be promoted positively (ODMI II, p. 610). Third, since supernatural beings are often considered to have material needs, 'they also possess property like men, and this must not be interfered with' (ODMI II, p. 626). And fourth, like the living, gods 'are widely believed to have a feeling of their worth and dignity. They are sensitive to insults and disrespect, they demand submissiveness and homage' (ODMI II, p. 639).

What then accounts for duties of this sort? Westermarck suggests that they are, for the most part, 'based on prudential considerations'. Supernatural beings must not be antagonised, because they are equally resentful as human beings, but 'owing to their supernatural powers, much more dangerous'. In addition, since divine punishments and rewards are often believed to come collectively, it is also a person's duty to his or her fellows 'to be on friendly terms with supernatural beings'. Lastly, moral rules prohibiting offences against gods or religion can be traced to the fact that moral disapproval or indignation attributed to gods is transmitted to followers. Since 'gods are regarded with genuine reverence by their worshippers [. . .] offences against religion naturally excite sympathetic resentment in the latter' (ODMI II, pp. 660–661).

Variations in moral standards

What emerges from Westermarck's examination is that social customs or moral norms can be divided into two kinds. They are, to a large extent, more or less arbitrary and changeable, stemming from the fact that a 'habit may develop into a genuine custom simply because men are inclined to disapprove of anything which is unusual' (HHM I, pp. 69–70). When a social habit, 'however trivial it may be', has developed into a custom, it constitutes a moral rule, and 'the unreflecting mind has a tendency to disapprove of any deviation from it' (ODMI, p. 159). On the other hand, in certain cases 'the transition from habit to custom has undoubtedly a deeper foundation' (HHM I, p. 70; also ODMI, p. 533). Westermarck refers here to basic obligations associated with parental care and marriage, but similar reasoning applies to his theory of sympathy-based moral norms. Ultimately, Westermarck strove to illustrate that they exist as an expression of 'the general uniformity of human nature' and especially human emotional constitution (ODMI II, p. 742; also 1908b, p. 29). In other words, for Westermarck, the altruistic and sympathetic tendencies are part of human biological heritage and make us to react in relatively similar ways to similar behaviours, in particular when they are directed towards members of the same social group.

As we have seen, Durkheim criticised Westermarck for neglecting the question of moral variations. Similarly, later sociologists have held that Westermarck 'was unable to describe differences originating in social conditions and varying moral climates' (Allardt, 2000, p. 304). Others have argued incorrectly that he attempted to explain cultural differences by biological causes (La Vergata, 2009, p. 337). Such views ignore the fact that Westermarck was one of the first to systematically explore variations and differences in moral practices and to identify their underlying causes. In Chapter 3, we discussed this issue in relation to the relationship between social customs and moral standards. I will now expand on these points by looking at Westermarck's wider perspective on moral differences.³

He attributes the variations in moral beliefs to three interrelated sources, which may be broadly described as environmental, cognitive and emotional. First, moral standards are greatly influenced by external circumstances. Examples of this can be found in the practice of infanticide that is conspicuously prevalent 'among poor tribes and in islands whose inhabitants are confined to a narrow territory with limited resources' (ODMI, pp. 399–401; ER, pp. 184–185). Environmental conditions may also lead to the practice of killing of aged parents, which is particularly common among nomadic hunter-gatherers, and which is connected with deficiencies in the food supply and the imperative need for directing the resources to the young and vigorous (ODMI, pp. 387–388; ER, pp. 184–185). Thus, 'necessity and the force of habit may deprive these actions of the stigma which would otherwise be attached to them' (ODMI II, p. 742), even to the point where they are continued even when no longer necessary, purely out of habit.

3 For Westermarck's philosophical arguments on moral differences, see Cook (1999).

Secondly, moral variations stem from cognitive factors associated with differences in knowledge and beliefs. Westermarck highlights 'the enormous influence' which religious and supernatural beliefs have 'exercised upon the moral ideas of mankind' (ODMI II, p. 745). Examples can be found in the different moral attitudes towards suicide, human sacrifice, and homosexuality, as well as in various taboos (ER, pp. 187–196). Similarly, as we shall see in the next chapter, psychological knowledge has radically changed views on the moral and legal responsibility of animals, the mentally deficient and the mentally ill.

Finally, the most common moral differences derive from variations in the strength and range of sympathy. Despite the great similarities of the content of basic moral norms, there has been great variation in the circle of people to whom these rules are held to apply (ODMI II, pp. 742–743; ER, pp. 197–202). As discussed in the previous chapter, the sphere of sympathy has expanded along with the human social linkages, but the distinction between in-group and out-group continues to appear on various occasions. In addition, naturally occurring variations in the strength of sympathy between different individuals with regard to their objects will always prevent moral judgements from being uniform (ODMI, pp. 11–12; ODMI II, p. 514; ER, pp. 207–213). This shows that people of the same social and cultural background may have fundamentally different views, for example, on how immigrants or animals ought to be treated. Because such conceptions and the application of moral rules reflect variations in altruistic and sympathetic feelings of each individual, argumentation or the same knowledge base does not as such lead to a consensus of opinions.

6 The anatomy of moral responsibility

Westermarck considered moral responsibility as one of the main topics of ethical inquiry. In the *Moral Ideas*, nearly half of the thirteen chapters dealing with his ‘general theory of the nature of moral consciousness’ (MML, p. 232) concern the practices of holding people responsible for their actions. Westermarck gives much attention to aggravating circumstances that increase the agent’s blame, mitigating circumstances that lessen responsibility and considerations that exempt the person altogether from moral blame. In *Ethical Relativity*, these examinations are summarised in a single chapter. Westermarck recognised responsibility judgements as an essential part of human social life. In our everyday interactions, we are deeply sensitive to factors determining responsibility as well as to a wide variety of mitigating and aggravating circumstances. He was also very interested in how these attitudes come to be reflected in criminal legislation.

Westermarck’s theory of responsibility is built round the question of what is the subject of moral judgement. He agrees with the view that ‘[m]oral judgments are commonly said to be passed upon conduct and character’ (ODMI, p. 202; ER, p. 148). The first of his main objectives was to resolve human conduct systematically into its different morally coloured elements and manifestations. Typical of him, the goal was not only to describe how moral judgements are concerned with conduct and character, but, above all, to explain why this is so. In Westermarck’s view, the regularities in the ways people make moral judgements cannot be understood without taking into account what kind of emotions the moral emotions are. For this reason, the study of conduct and character goes to the very core of Westermarck’s ethics. He believed that his whole theory of retributive emotions is supported by a detailed study of the elements of human conduct which evoke them (ODMI, p. 22; ODMI II, pp. 741–742; ER, p. 177).

This chapter begins by discussing Westermarck’s analysis of ‘conduct’. I examine his concepts of ‘act’, ‘intention’, ‘event’, ‘motive’ and the consequences and side-effects of action. I also explore his account of how people react to negligence, heedlessness and inadvertence. In the next section, I show how Westermarck examines the influence of chance on moral judgements, which is called the phenomenon of moral luck. In the section that follows, I explain how Westermarck analyses the relationship between character and moral responsibility. I also outline his exploration of the role of ‘innate’ and ‘acquired character’ in moral

evaluation. In the final section, I focus on Westermarck's answer to the problem of why moral judgements are directed towards the agent's will and, on the other hand, why people in general are not considered accountable for actions that are beyond their control. Throughout this section, I also explore his examination of what kind of cognitive factors affect human conceptions of moral agency. Finally, I conclude by examining Westermarck's argument on average conduct serving as a benchmark for moral evaluation.

What is conduct

The concept of act

Westermarck's account of responsibility begins with an analysis of the term 'conduct'. In the first place, conduct refers to acts. In Westermarck's sense of the term, an act consists of an *event* and the agent's *intention* to produce it (ODMI, pp. 203–204, 206; ER, p. 148). Intention is defined as 'a volition or determination to realise the idea of a certain event'. Thus, what distinguishes an act from a random event is that it has an 'immediate mental cause'. The intended consequences of an act are either part of the act or 'acts by themselves'. In the former case, the consequences *are* the event. The latter case implies that, analytically speaking, human action may be said to consist of several distinct acts which all have only one intention. Because intention refers to the agent's will to bring about 'a certain event', there can be only one intention in one act (ODMI, pp. 203–204).

When we observe and evaluate the actions of others, Westermarck argues that our focus is not really on the event, but on the agent's intention (ODMI, p. 205; ER, p. 149). The basic distinction between intentional and unintentional actions is an anthropological universal, although it is usual that in primitive societies external events have a greater impact on moral judgements. This is largely because an 'unreflecting mind [. . .] does not press the question whether the harm was caused by the agent's will or not'. Rather, it is inclined to assume that the event and the will are linked together. However, in clear-cut cases, people universally distinguish events that are intended from those that are unintentional. Even a dog 'distinguishes between being stumbled over and being kicked' (ODMI, pp. 219–220, 237–238; ER, pp. 162–164, 167–168).¹ Moral judgements are passed on intention because it expresses the person's will. For this reason, intention may arouse moral disapproval even when it does not materialise in action. Even mere *wishes* for something to happen may be morally loaded. People may be approved or disapproved for their wishes because like

1 Like Westermarck, anthropologist Donald Brown (1991) emphasises that in all known societies people 'see the person as responsible for his actions. They distinguish actions that are under control from those that are not. They understand the concept of intention' (p. 135). For a review of current moral-psychological research on the relationship between intentionality and moral evaluation, see Malle (2006); Malle & Guglielmo (2011).

intentions, wishes are volitions; they express the agent's will (ODMI, pp. 205–206; ER, pp. 148–150).

Responsibility extends further than the act itself. It covers the 'consequences of an act as are foreseen by the agent, and such incidents as are known by him to be involved in his act'. These *foreseen side-effects of action* refer to cases in which a person performs an act intended to bring about one effect, but is aware that it will have other consequences as well. To retell Westermarck's example, if a dissident sets a bomb in the platform where a dictator holds a speech, the dissident's intention is to kill the ruler and the foreseen side-effect is the danger exposed to others. On the other hand, no one is held responsible for such consequences or side-effects that he or she could not be aware of. Westermarck observes that in many cases, moral praise, in particular, refers rather to the act's possible side-effects than the act itself. For example, the merit of an altruistic act often lies in the fact that the knowledge of the danger to which people exposed themselves did not prevent them from acting as they did. Similarly, 'the merit of the charitable man really depends on the loss which he inflicts upon himself by giving his property to the needy'. There are also cases in which people are held praiseworthy because *they do not want to avoid some foreseen side-effects of their action*. The person's merit, then, lies in the fact that he acts in a certain way, 'though he knows that his deed will benefit someone who has injured him, and towards the average man in similar circumstances would display resentment' (ODMI, pp. 212–214, 249; ER, pp. 156–158).

The motive of the act

Westermarck distinguishes between intention and motive. Motive is the underlying cause of, or the reason for, the agent's intention, in other words, 'that which "moves" the will' (ODMI, p. 207; ER, p. 150). As Blanshard (1961) puts it, Westermarck argues that we 'pass judgments on what a man does, but we do so *in the light of* what he intended to do', and, furthermore, 'what moved him to do it' (p. 111). Motives, however, are usually given less attention than intentions. This is because intention is normally apparent in the act itself, whereas the underlying motive is not. In practice, motives and intentions 'are subjects of moral valuation not separately, but as a unity' (ODMI, pp. 207–209, 283).

Motives influence moral evaluation in two ways. First, we need to make a distinction between motives that are intentions and motives that are non-voluntary and beyond the agent's control. A motive belonging to the first category 'obviously falls within the sphere of moral valuation' (ODMI, p. 207; ER, p. 150). We do not feel gratitude if someone helps us merely in the hope of a reward. When we are being lied to, our feelings towards that person are very different depending on whether he or she is attempting to benefit from our expense or trying to save us from serious trouble (ODMI, pp. 316, 318). When the agent's motive is an intention itself, it belongs to another but related act. This is because, for Westermarck, a single act can only have one intention. For example, when dissidents try to kill the dictator in order to save their country, we have two distinct but related acts.

Their intention to save the country is the motive of their intention to kill the dictator. There is no doubt that it affects many people's opinions on the matter (ODMI, p. 207; ER, p. 150).

Secondly, motives that are involuntary impulses are not as such morally loaded, but they 'may nevertheless indirectly exercise much influence on moral judgements'. This is because motives of this sort are generally considered as mitigating circumstances. When a person steals food to satisfy his or her hunger, appetite as an involuntary impulse has no moral value in itself. No one is held blameworthy for his or her hunger. However, 'other things being equal, the person in question is less guilty in proportion as his hunger is more intense'. It is thus clear that in this and many other cases, 'moral judgment is modified by the pressure which the non-volitional motive exercises upon the agent's will' (ODMI, pp. 207–208; also ER, pp. 150–151). Similarly, we feel differently towards a person who injures us 'under the influence of a non-volitional impulse, too strong for any ordinary man to resist'. The same applies to actions people are compelled against their will. Both in ordinary moral judgements and modern criminal legislation, acting under compulsion reduces or wholly eliminates responsibility (ODMI, pp. 283–284, 316).

Emotions, too, are held as mitigating considerations. Westermarck recognises that people may be so overwhelmed by anger or fear that they cannot resist acting in a certain way. More precisely, the question is of 'the non-volitional conative element involved in an emotion'. Westermarck emphasises that the difference between deliberate injuries and the ones inflicted in overwhelming and uncontrollable anger is widely recognised in different cultures. It is very common that people are held less guilty if their actions are motivated by anger caused by a wrong done to themselves, and 'both morality and law take into consideration the degree of provocation to which the agent was exposed' (ODMI, pp. 208, 284, 294–298). Thus, 'if any one commits a crime in a rage he is less blamable, and punished less severely, than if he commits the same crime in cold blood' (ER, p. 151).

Negligence and carelessness

In addition to what people do, they are blamed for what they fail to do. Westermarck distinguishes between forbearances and omissions on the one hand, and between heedlessness and inadvertency on the other.² Due to its intentional nature, forbearance from doing something 'is morally equivalent to an act'. Omission, on the other hand, 'is characterized by the absence of volition'. The blameworthiness thus lies in that a person omits to do something that ought to be done because he or she does not think of it. In such cases, moral disapproval is directed towards the person's negligence. Because we disapprove not only of acts and forbearances, but also omissions, Westermarck highlights that moral judgements

2 Westermarck's distinction is derived from the British legal theorist John Austin (1869).

may 'refer not only to willing, but to not-willing as well'. The reason behind this is that the 'power in a person which is called his "will" is regarded' also as a cause 'of such events as we think that the person "could" have prevented by his will' (ODMI, pp. 209–212, emphasis added; also ER, pp. 154–155).

Westermarck also pays attention to heedlessness and inadvertence. Heedlessness is closely related to negligence. A heedless person is disapproved for doing something he should omit to do, 'because he does not consider its probable or possible consequences'. While negligence is marked by the 'absence of acting', in the case of heedlessness, 'there is acting'. Finally, people may be blamed for inadvertence or rashness. In this case, the agent is aware of the harm that may follow, but he or she is disapproved for not being attentive enough. What negligence, heedlessness and inadvertence have in common is that moral disapproval is directed upon the total or partial lack of attention, in other words, upon 'not-willing' (ODMI, pp. 211–212; ER, pp. 154–155). That is to say, we hold people responsible for any consequences of their behaviour that 'we attribute to want of due attention' (ODMI, p. 249). The related moral emotions are also reflected in modern legislation. The agent is generally held 'liable for harm caused by him through want of ordinary care and foresight', although 'it depends on the nature of the case whether he will have to pay damages or to suffer punishment' (ODMI, p. 308).

There are also cases in which the *absence of volition* may give rise to moral praise. We praise someone who refrains from doing something, 'beneficial to himself but harmful to others, which, in similar circumstances, would have proved too great a temptation for any ordinary man'. This may evoke moral praise even though the alternative to act differently did not come to a person's mind, because the fact that they did not think of it signals the nature of their will. As noted, there are also cases in which people evoke moral approval because, even though the beneficiary is a personal enemy, they do not want to avoid the beneficial consequences of their action (ODMI, pp. 213–214; ER, pp. 157–158).

All this notwithstanding, there is a significant attitudinal difference between action and the absence of action. Moral indignation 'is much more easily aroused by action than by the absence of it', and this is because a 'person who commits a harmful deed is a more obvious cause of pain than a person who causes harm by doing nothing'. In this case, too, the emotional difference between causing harm by acting and not-acting manifests itself in modern criminal legislation. It draws much more attention to positive acts than forbearances and omissions, 'and one reason for this is that they evoke little public indignation' (ODMI, p. 303).

To sum up, Westermarck analyses human conduct as the subject of moral judgement into different manifestations:

By a man's conduct in a certain case is understood a volition, or the absence of a volition in him – which is often, but not always or necessarily, expressed in an act, forbearance, or omission – viewed with reference to all such circumstances as may influence its moral character.

(ODMI, p. 214)

To put it more clearly, moral judgements may be passed upon (1) volitions expressed in acts and forbearances, as well as (2) volitions that do not actually materialise in action. Examples of the latter are the cases where people are disapproved for forming a certain intention without performing the corresponding action. For the same reason, distinct wishes may arouse retributive emotions because wishes are volitions, expressions of the person's will. Besides volitions, moral judgements may refer to (3) 'the absence of volition', or 'not-willing'. Such behaviours include negligence, heedlessness and inadvertence.

This classification structures the bulk of Westermarck's *Moral Ideas*. The comparative parts of the work are devoted to the most 'important modes of conduct with which the moral consciousness of mankind is concerned'. The largest section is devoted to 'acts, forbearances, and omissions' that 'directly concern the interests of other men'. The second section concerns 'acts, forbearances, and omissions' affecting principally the agent's own welfare. The third group of chapters deals with sexual morality. Human conduct towards animals is also of moral concern, likewise people's relations with the dead. Finally, a large and last section is devoted to people's 'conduct towards beings, real or imaginary, that they regard as supernatural' (ODMI, pp. 327–328).

The influence of consequences of action on moral judgements

Although Westermarck emphasises that moral judgements are typically passed on intention, he observes that the actual results or effects of action have a great influence on our retributive emotions. This shows not only in how people react to actions that fail to produce the intended effects, but also in human reactions towards negligence and accidents. In this context, Westermarck discusses the influence of chance on moral judgements, which contemporary philosophers call the phenomenon of moral luck (Williams, 1982; Nagel, 1979). Westermarck's account of moral luck is much indebted to Adam Smith.³ He refers to Smith's observation that everyone in theory 'agrees to the general maxim' according to which the agent should be praised and blamed only for 'the intention of the heart from which he acted'. Smith argues that the 'self-evident justice' of this maxim is 'acknowledged by all the world, and there is not a dissenting voice among all mankind' (ODMI, pp. 237–238; TMS, pp. 92–93, 104–105). However, Smith and Westermarck observe that when we come to particular cases, our emotions manifest themselves differently.

Like Smith, Westermarck argues that despite the agent's bad intention, if the act fails to produce the intended effect, our indignation towards the agent is diminished. This is apparent also in criminal law as a wrongdoing that fails is normally

³ For discussion on Smith on moral luck, see Russell (1999); Flanders (2006); Hankins (2016). Thomas Nagel (1979) identifies the kind of moral luck discussed by Smith (and Westermarck) as 'consequential luck'. As we shall see, Westermarck examines also the kind of moral luck Nagel calls 'constitutive luck', referring to innate personal characteristics outside of person's control.

punished much less severely than an accomplished act. From Smith's and Westermarck's perspective, this is due to the simple fact that a failure arouses much less moral disapproval than a successful crime. The same applies to good acts. Like Smith, Westermarck observes that despite the agent's good intention, if the act fails to produce the intended effect, our gratitude or approval towards the agent is diminished. As Westermarck puts it, 'good intentions without corresponding deeds meet with little applause even when the failure is due to mere misfortune' (ODMI, pp. 237–241, 247; TMS, pp. 97–99).⁴ In other words, the agent's intention is not all that counts in moral evaluation. In practice, Westermarck quotes Smith, the 'world judges by the event and not by the design' (ODMI, p. 238; TMS, p. 104).

A related indication of these moral-psychological regularities is that people's reactions are often disproportionate to the harm or benefit caused. The agent's guilt is easily 'exaggerated on account of the grave consequences of his act'; and, correspondingly, 'the benefits which result from a good act easily induce us to exaggerate the goodness of the agent' (ODMI, pp. 240, 247). Similarly, Smith observes that when human actions cause substantial damage or benefit, our gratitude or resentment tend to be 'beyond what is due to the motives or affections from which they proceed'. Even when there is nothing in the agent's intention 'that deserved either praise or blame', the good or bad consequences 'often throw a shadow of merit or demerit upon the agent'. For this reason, an innocent messenger may be subjected to outbursts of joy or anger (TMS, p. 101).

The influence of chance on moral evaluation shows also how people react to negligence. If no harmful consequences follow, we usually feel little or no moral disapproval. In such cases, the person also 'generally escapes all punishment' (ODMI, pp. 240–241, 308). On the other hand, the psychological importance of actual consequences comes up in human reactions towards accidents. In many cases, the agent is held responsible and must one way or another compensate the damage caused, even though it was unintended and 'even though no foresight could have reasonably been expected to look out for it' (ODMI, pp. 308–309).

Finally, the importance of the consequences of action shows how people react to unfulfilled intentions. As Westermarck points out, people are not generally 'punished for intentions unaccompanied by external deeds'. While it is true that intention alone may arouse moral disapproval, 'an outward event is generally needed for shaking him ["the average man"] up' (ODMI, pp. 244–246). Again, Smith makes a similar remark on intentions that are not put into practice (TMS, pp. 99–100). There are, however, cases where the outward event is not necessary for strong emotional arousal. If an act has a tendency to give rise to 'extreme horror, the very intention may give such a shock to the public imagination as to call for punishment' (ODMI, p. 245). Similarly, Smith observes that there are crimes that arouse such strong resentment in mankind that a 'mere attempt to commit it' is severely punished. In 'smaller crimes', however, a mere attempt 'is almost always punished very light, and sometimes is not punished at all' (TMS, p. 100).

4 Instead of Smith, Westermarck cites here Hume (E, p. 228).

From conduct to character, and the other way around

After discussing the different aspects of human conduct, Westermarck argues that when we look more closely at how people make moral judgements, it comes out that they are not actually passed on intentions or volitions ‘in the abstract, but on the persons who have them; *they* are held blamable or worthy of praise’ (ER, p. 152). We feel moral emotions, ‘not with reference to certain modes of conduct *per se*, but with reference to persons on account of their conduct’ (ODMI, p. 310). One can even say that it is alien to human experience ‘to dissociate the act from the agent’ (ER, p. 153; see also pp. 85–86; ODMI, pp. 92–93). For Westermarck, this fundamental feature of moral behaviour stems directly from the nature of moral emotions. Like other retributive emotions, moral emotions are *reactive attitudes of mind towards living beings* regarded as the cause of pleasure or pain. However, people are not praised or blamed only for what they *do*, but also for what they *are*. This brings us to character. As Westermarck puts it, there is ‘an intimate connection between character and conduct as subjects of moral valuation. When judging of a man’s conduct in a special instance, we judge of his character, and when judging of his character we judge of his conduct in general’ (ODMI, p. 215; ER, p. 159).

The relationship between conduct and character is fundamental to Westermarck’s ethics because it lies at the heart of the problem of moral responsibility. The gist of Westermarck’s position is that ‘[w]e impute a person’s conduct to *him* only in so far as we regard it as a result or manifestation of his character, as directly or indirectly due to his will’ (ER, p. 159; also ODMI, p. 214). In his definition, character is ‘a person’s will regarded as a continuous entity’, or (following Samuel Alexander) ‘simply that of which individual pieces of conduct are the manifestation’. For this very reason, when we pass moral judgements, we conceive people’s character as the *cause* of their conduct (ODMI, pp. 214–215, 310–312; ER, pp. 158–159).

Westermarck’s view of responsibility and character is derived directly from Hume. According to Hume, as cited by Westermarck,

Actions are, by their very nature, temporary and perishing; and *where they proceed not from some cause in the character and disposition of the person who performed them, they can neither redound to his honour, if good; nor infamy, if evil* [. . .] the person is not answerable for them; and as they proceeded from nothing in him that is durable and constant, and leave nothing of that nature behind them, it is impossible he can, upon their account, become the object of punishment or vengeance.

(E, p. 98; ODMI, pp. 214–215, emphasis added;
also T, p. 411; ER, p. 159)

Hume stresses that in order for any action to give rise to moral praise or blame, it is ‘only as a sign of some quality or character’. A person’s action ‘must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct,

and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle [. . .] are never consider'd in morality' (T, p. 575; also T, p. 477).⁵ Like Hume, Westermarck emphasises that even when it seems that 'moral judgment immediately refers to a distinct act, it takes notice of the agent's will as a whole', that is, the person's character (ODMI, pp. 310–311).

In order to vindicate his Humean thesis of responsibility, Westermarck lays out three facts of moral behaviour. The first concerns the logic of forgiveness. People tend to feel moral indignation 'as long as its cause remain unaltered', and the will of the offender 'ceases to be offensive only when he acknowledges his guilt and repents'. In other words, remorse is regarded as a sign of the alteration of the will. Because retributive emotions are directed towards the agent's will, '[b]adness can only be forgiven, and moral forgiveness can be granted only on condition that the agent's mind has undergone a radical alteration for the better, that the badness of the will has given way to repentance' (ODMI, pp. 85–86, 311). Similarly, for Hume, 'repentance wipes off every crime, especially if attended with and evident reformation of life and manners' (T, p. 412; also E, p. 99). As Paul Russell (1995) puts it, Hume suggests that the change of our moral sentiments 'is produced by showing that the agent repents of his action and has subsequently altered his character in this respect' (p. 103). Westermarck even sees the desire to produce repentance as an inherent feature of moral indignation. When we feel moral indignation we want to remove the cause that aroused the emotion – the agent's bad will – and this can take place only 'by bringing about repentance in the offender' (ODMI, p. 84). Quoting Smith, Westermarck argues that the object of moral resentment is not so much to cause suffering to the guilty but to make him conscious that we feel it because of his past action, '*to make him repent of that conduct*, and to make him sensible, that the person whom he injured did not deserve to be treated in that manner' (TMS, pp. 95–96; ODMI, p. 88, emphasis added).

Second, people tend to distinguish between morally bad behaviours committed in cold blood and those performed in the heat of passion. In Westermarck's view, we feel more strongly about actions that are performed carefully and deliberately, because they are held as *truer expressions* of the agent's character than actions performed impulsively and uncontrollably. These emotional tendencies are also reflected in criminal legislation (ODMI, pp. 206, 294, 311). Similarly, Hume observes that since actions that are performed 'hastily and unpremeditatedly' do not express the agent's whole character equally well as the ones that 'proceed from thought and deliberation', we are inclined to react more strongly to the last mentioned (T, p. 412; E, pp. 98–99). Finally, the consideration of the agent's character underlies the common practice of punishing convicted criminals who repeat their offences more severely than first times (ODMI, p. 311). Because reoffending is considered as a sign of one's character, there is a general tendency to think that repeat offenders also deserve a more severe punishment.

5 For detailed examination of Hume's theory of responsibility, see Russell (1995).

Emotions and opinions

People are often disapproved of for their emotions. Westermarck observes that anger that is perceived as unjustified commonly arouses moral disapproval in others. Similarly, envy and malicious delight are common incentives to moral blame. However, even in the cases where moral disapproval seems to, on the face of it, concern a person's emotions, the actual subject of moral judgement is character. The order of things is that *we interpret the agent's emotions as expressions of character*, and therefore we disapprove of the person who feels them (for example, in a wrong situation). People also interpret the *absence of emotions* in the same way. We may disapprove of persons who are not affected by the plight of their friend; and conversely, people who manage to control their emotions and act impartially in a personally difficult and emotive situation evoke moral praise (ODMI, p. 215; ER, pp. 159–161).

Also, opinions are often subjects of moral judgement. For Westermarck, one of the distinctive features of moral behaviour is how easily opinions that differ from our own give rise to moral disapproval. In *Ethical Relativity*, Westermarck says more clearly that the disapproval of opinions refers not so much to the opinion as such as the *idea of its realisation in practice*, or the *consequences it is supposed to lead*. Therefore, strictly speaking, the subject of moral disapproval is the act of pronouncing or propagating certain ideas (ODMI, pp. 116, 215–216; ER, pp. 107, 161). Thus, moral blame refers 'to the cause of the opinion within the will' (ODMI, p. 216), that is, *what kind of a person holds an opinion* that we regard as morally problematic. Then we are again back in character. In the light of Westermarck's analysis of opinions and moral emotions, the frequent occurrence of *argumentum ad hominem* is no surprise. Due to the nature of the moral emotions, the strong tendency to criticise the *person behind* claims and arguments – whether moral, political, religious or even scientific – whom we personally find unappealing is an inseparable part of human moral behaviour.

Innate and acquired character

So far we have been concerned with Westermarck's account of how moral judgements are passed on people's will and character, assigned as the cause of their conduct. We have also seen that responsibility is lessened in proportion as the agent's will is exposed to pressures and influences, whether internal or external, which are beyond personal control. Westermarck's anatomy of responsibility, however, goes further than this. In his view, in the final analysis, our moral judgements are passed on the agent's 'innate character'.

This is illustrated with two examples. The first is a 'licentious man' whose mindset and character have been shaped by an environment that is itself corrupt. Such a person is generally held 'less blamable than an equally licentious man who has always lived under conditions favourable to virtue' but who nevertheless sinks to evil. Another example is a pickpocket who has been kidnapped as a child by a band of robbers. According to Westermarck, most of us would hold the person's

life-course as a mitigating circumstance. The influence of external circumstances upon the person's character does not wholly eliminate responsibility, because it may be said that he or she could have, despite everything, resisted them (ODMI, pp. 324–325; ER, p. 178). However, as Westermarck puts it, most of us would agree that 'the influences of environment and the circumstances of upbringing are not irrelevant to the degree of his guilt' (ER, p. 178).

It is here that Westermarck's notion of innate character comes into view. When we say or think that a person 'is influenced by external circumstances' which lessen his responsibility, or when someone's life-course leads us to think that he was 'subdued by fate', Westermarck suggests that 'we regard *him* as existing independently of that which influences or subdues him'. In other words, we tend to distinguish between the original and acquired character, between the person's 'original self' and the part of self which is 'the product of external circumstances'. Simply put, '*we attribute to him an innate character which is acted upon from the outside*' (ODMI, pp. 325–326; emphasis added; also ER, pp. 178, 181–182). Thus, in Westermarck's reasoning, the innate character becomes more visible in persons who are exposed to good influences only during their maturation but who are nevertheless corrupt.

It seems evident that when we make moral judgements, 'we do not know or cannot know, how far his character is due to education or environment and how far it is not'. Westermarck's view of the formation of personality is interactionist. Individual development is marked by 'a constant action and reaction between the external and internal conditions', and it is impossible 'to draw a hard and fast line between the two'. However, according to Westermarck, the view that the proper subject of moral evaluation is the innate character is supported by the fact that 'our moral judgment might be different if we had such knowledge' (ER, pp. 178–179).

Westermarck does not assume that character is unchangeable. However, in his view, it seems obvious that the changes of character in a person 'are imputable to *him* only in so far as they are caused by his innate character'. Unfortunately, Westermarck does not elaborate on this complex notion. He merely cites and agrees with Schopenhauer that the innate character is the person's 'real core' which 'contains the germs of all his virtues and vices' (ODMI, p. 326). What Westermarck seems to argue is that we tend to think that people deserve praise or blame for the changes in character only insofar as these changes somehow reflect the innate parts of their self.

This leads to a paradox in the moral psychology of responsibility. On the one hand, the agent's moral responsibility is affected by 'the influences to which his innate character has been subjected from the outside world'. But on the other hand, it is obvious that our innate character is a 'product of something outside ourselves'. No one has control over their innate character. The gist of Westermarck's theory of responsibility is that these considerations have *not in the least influence* on our retributive emotions. We simply approve and disapprove of people for what they are like, 'and beyond that' our moral emotions 'cannot go' (ER, pp. 179–182). To illustrate his point, Westermarck draws a parallel between moral and aesthetic experiences. Our moral emotions are not 'concerned with the origin

of the innate character', any more than 'the aesthetic emotions are concerned with the origin of the beautiful object' (ODMI, p. 326; ER, p. 182). We do not consider the origin of innate character, any more than 'when we enjoy the music of a violin, we do not consider that it is produced by the rubbing of hairs from a horse-tail against the dried intestines of sheep' (Westermarck, 1939, p. 150).

Westermarck's account of innate character and responsibility is very similar to Thomas Nagel's analysis of what he calls 'constitutive moral luck'. This species of moral luck concerns 'the kind of person you are, where this is not just a question of what you deliberately do, but of your inclinations, capacities, and temperament'. Like Westermarck, Nagel recognises that one's morally problematic personal characteristics are 'largely a matter of constitutive bad fortune. Yet people are morally condemned for such qualities, and esteemed for others equally beyond the control of the will: they are assessed for what they are like' (Nagel, 1979, pp. 28, 33). Westermarck's approach to responsibility bears a close resemblance also to P. F. Strawson's (1962) 'naturalistic turn' on the problem of free will and responsibility. As McKenna and Russell (2012) put it, Strawson's strategy 'involves turning away from conceptual issues about the analysis of "freedom" and "responsibility" and taking a closer look at what actually goes on when we hold a person responsible'. Like Westermarck, Strawson focuses on our 'reactive attitudes and feelings' and argues that 'ordinary life carries on unaffected and unconcerned' by the philosophical disputes about free will and responsibility (p. 5). As Westermarck points out, the same is true for professional philosophers, because retributive emotions towards human agents 'are felt by determinists and indeterminists alike' (ER, p. 180; also ODMI, pp. 321–322).

The emotional determination of moral responsibility

As we have seen, Westermarck attached much weight to Hume's account of responsibility and character. Despite this, Westermarck argues that Hume ignored the more fundamental question, that is, *why* our sentiments of moral approval and disapproval are directed towards the agent's will. Kant allotted the question much attention and suggested that nothing but the will can be morally good.⁶ More specifically, Kant argues that 'the good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes or because of its adequacy to achieve some proposed end'. Instead 'it is good only because of its willing, i.e. it is good of itself' (Kant, [1785] 2012, pp. 9–10). However, from Westermarck's perspective, Kant merely states the existing state of affairs without any attempt to provide an answer to the crucial question, *why* is this so?⁷ Westermarck declares that '[w]e cannot content ourselves with the bare fact that nothing but the will is morally good or bad'. Instead '[w]e must try to explain' this fundamental moral-psychological phenomenon (ODMI, p. 314).⁸

6 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 19.

7 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 19.

8 For Westermarck's analysis and critique of Kant's ethics, see ER, pp. 264–291.

Westermarck's explanation of why moral judgements centre around the agent's will looks back on Adam Smith. This does not, however, come out from the relevant sections of his published writings where Westermarck makes only a few insignificant references to him. In his lectures, on the other hand, Westermarck gives Smith credit especially in this respect. It is in this context that Westermarck states that 'the retributive nature of moral emotions throws light on the deepest shafts of the moral consciousness, and that is mainly why I appreciate Smith's work so high'.⁹

Westermarck's answer to the question of why moral judgements are passed on 'conduct and character', or the person's will as it manifests in actual conduct, is strikingly simple. He traces the solution directly back to *what kind of emotions the moral emotions are*. Moral judgements are passed on 'conduct and character', or the agent's will,

because such judgments spring from moral emotions; because the moral emotions are retributive emotions; because a retributive emotion is a reactive attitude of mind, either kindly or hostile, towards a living being (or something looked upon in the light of a living being), regarded as a cause of pleasure or as a cause of pain; and because a living being is regarded as a true cause of pleasure or pain only in so far as this feeling is assumed to be caused by its will.
(ODMI, p. 314; also ODMI II, p. 741; ER, p. 172)

The gist of Westermarck's argument is that we hold people responsible for their actions only if we feel retributive emotions towards them. This in turn is inextricably linked to the question about the kind of entities that can be the subjects of these emotions. The essential points to emerge from the foregoing are that, first, we must consider the object as the *cause of pleasure or pain* (which we may experience first-hand or vicariously). Second, the object must be a *living and sentient being*. For example, we do not disapprove of damages caused by natural disasters. Third, the object must be a *willing or volitional being*, because retributive emotions are reactions to pleasure and pain caused by the agent's will.

Let us now look at what Smith says about what kinds of objects are held responsible for their actions. Smith discusses the matter by means of what kind of things are in ordinary life the subjects of our sentiments of gratitude and resentment. For something to be a 'complete and proper object' of gratitude or resentment, (1) it must be the cause of pleasure or pain; (2) it must be capable of feeling them and (3) it must have produced pleasure or pain intentionally. If any of these qualifications is missing or incomplete, we feel less or no gratitude or resentment towards the object (TMS, p. 96).

Thus, Smith and Westermarck present a sentimentalist theory of moral responsibility. First of all, retributive emotions are always directed towards the cause of pleasure or pain. In addition to this, retributive emotions are felt towards living and sentient beings. Smith and Westermarck observe that our resentment may be

9 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 18–19.

momentarily directed also to inanimate things. Everyday experience shows that we may curse and kick a chair or stone that hurts us, 'we thus behave as if the offending object were capable of feeling our resentment, we for a moment vaguely believe that it is alive' (ODMI, p. 262). However, 'our anger disappears as soon as we reflect that the thing in question is incapable of feeling pain' (ODMI, p. 315). Smith uses the same example and points out that 'the least reflection, indeed, corrects this sentiment, and we soon become sensible, that what has no feeling is a very improper object of revenge' (TMS, p. 94). By the same token, Westermarck follows Smith in arguing that we may feel some kind of gratitude or affection for inanimate objects which have given us great pleasure. Westermarck says, quoting Smith, that 'a man grows fond of a snuff-box, of a pen-knife, of a staff which he has long made use of, and conceives something like a real love and affection for them'. However, both of them observe that gratitude proper can be felt towards such objects only that are themselves capable of feeling pleasure (ODMI, p. 318; TMS, p. 94).

Because retributive emotions are felt towards sentient beings, animals are more suitable objects of these emotions than inanimate things. According to Westermarck, one can even say that 'there is a general tendency' to treat animals as if they were 'proper objects of moral censure'. This shows, for example, that when a dog or a horse 'obstinately refuses to submit to its master's will', it arouses 'resentment which almost claims to be righteous'. Moreover, quoting Smith, Westermarck explains that if animals cause human death, 'neither the public, nor the relations of the slain, can be satisfied, unless they are put to death in their turn, nor is this merely for the security of the living, but, in some measure, *to revenge the injury of the dead*' (ODMI, p. 251; TMS, pp. 94–95, emphasis added). These emotional reactions are basically akin to how human wrongdoers are punished for their shocking acts. The animal or the human individual has 'to suffer on account of the indignation it aroused' (ODMI, p. 257).

Westermarck argues that in light of this, it is not surprising that at different times and in different cultures animals have been treated as responsible agents. When this is the case, it is mostly due to the fact that animals are believed to be more or less human-like beings. Similarly, cognitive factors affecting conceptions of moral agency are reflected in the fact that when people do not have such beliefs, animals are not regarded as responsible agents (ODMI, pp. 251, 254, 258, 260; also ER, pp. 168–170). When responsibility is not assigned to animals, it is due, above all, to the fact that people understand that 'they are incapable of recognising any act of theirs as right or wrong'. As we have seen, one of the regularities of moral responsibility judgements is that agents are held responsible for the consequences or side-effects of their actions only in so far as they can be aware of them. Consequently, 'it is obvious that no act is wrong which the agent could not know to be wrong' (ODMI, p. 249). This is the main reason we do not regard animals as moral agents.¹⁰

10 Similarly, Smith observes that although animals are sentient beings, they 'are still far from being complete and perfect objects, either of gratitude or resentment; and those passions still feel, that there is something wanting to their entire gratification' (TMS, p. 95).

For the same reason, people do not generally feel the desire to punish small children or the mentally ill. The necessary prerequisite for this is the psychological insight and understanding of 'their inability to judge of the nature of their acts'. If so, small children and the mentally ill are not held as responsible agents (ODMI, p. 316; see also ODMI, pp. 264–277, 298–299).

Finally, Smith and Westermarck observe that in order for resentment or gratitude to arise – and for us to hold human agents praiseworthy or blameworthy – they must have produced pleasure or pain intentionally. Conversely, we do not feel these emotions when another person harms or benefits us unintentionally. Provided the person is not guilty of excessive negligence, we do not feel anger or indignation if someone hurts us by accident. We do not feel gratitude or moral praise towards a person who does us good by pure chance. Similarly, because retributive emotions are directed at the agent's will, 'our anger abates, or ceases altogether', if we find that the person 'who injured us acted under compulsion' or under the influence of some other involuntary impulse, 'too strong for any ordinary man to resist'. In such cases, the agent's behaviour does not reflect 'his real self' (ODMI, pp. 314–318).

To sum up, in Westermarck's theory of moral responsibility, a 'moral agent' is a 'sentient and volitional entity' who is capable of understanding the nature of his or her actions and foreseeing their consequences. When knowledge and reflective thought play a sufficient role in moral judgements, people do not feel moral indignation towards animals, small children, the mentally deficient or the mentally ill. In such conditions, these agents are 'totally or partially exempted from moral blame and legal punishment' (ODMI, pp. 92–93, 249, 269, 316, 319).

Moral neutrality and the average person

While Westermarck focuses largely on moral disapproval or indignation, he observes that most behaviours are morally neutral, arousing neither approval nor disapproval in other people. As long as human beings live roughly up to the customs of a society or social group in which they belong, their actions and motives are not viewed in more detail, 'and when we call their actions right we neither blame nor praise them' (ER, p. 153; see also ODMI, pp. 154–157). Westermarck outlines a theory of praise and blame in which a sort of 'average' actions – an intuitive, socially learned understanding of how people typically behave in similar circumstances – serve as a benchmark for moral evaluation. In his view, '[w]e praise, and, especially, we regard as deserving praise, only what is above the average, and we censure what is below it' (ODMI, p. 151; ER, p. 140). This observation gets a variety of manifestations in his writings.

First, no one deserves praise for abiding by moral rules that are generally obeyed and which transgression gives rise to moral disapproval. We do not praise people for performing their duties, that is, for doing something which omission tends to evoke moral disapproval (ODMI, pp. 136, 150; ER, pp. 125, 139). However, the agent is held praiseworthy 'on account of an act which, from a strict point of view, is his duty, but a duty which *most people*, under the same circumstances, would

fail to comply' (ODMI, p. 151, emphasis added; also ER, pp. 124–125, 140). We have also seen that to forbear from doing something may evoke moral approval. People assign moral praise to a person who refrains from doing something that would benefit him but inflict harm to some other person or to others, 'which in similar circumstances would have proved too great a temptation to *any ordinary man*' (ODMI, p. 213; ER, p. 157, emphasis added).

Second, although less commonly, there are also situations in which we assign moral praise to people for not wanting to avoid some consequences of their action. The agent's merit, then, lies in the fact he acts in a certain way, 'although he knows that his deed will benefit someone who has injured him, and towards whom the *average man* in similar circumstances would display resentment' (ODMI, p. 214; ER, p. 158, emphasis added). Third, similar considerations are involved in evaluating negligence. Both ordinary moral standards and modern legislation presume that people should in their actions abide by '*ordinary care and foresight*'. Conversely, such negligence arouses moral disapproval that is below the level of ordinary care which people are obliged to follow. For this reason, human beings are held responsible for unintentional injuries that result from a want of 'due' or 'proper' foresight (ODMI, pp. 208, 235, 308, 317–318, emphasis added). Finally, Westermarck employs the idea of the average person when examining human motivations. Our indignation lessens if we find that the person who injured us acted under coercion, or was influenced by an emotion 'too strong for *any ordinary man* to resist'. In these cases, the agent is also partially or totally exempted from moral blame (ODMI, p. 316; ER, p. 174; see also ODMI, p. 284; ER, p. 151).

Like many other aspects of Westermarck's study of moral responsibility, his account of average behaviours draws on Adam Smith. 'That seems blamable', Smith says, 'which falls short of that *ordinary degree of proper beneficence* which experience teaches us to except from every body'. Similarly, only 'that seems praise-worthy which goes beyond it'. Smith also pays attention to morally neutral behaviour, suggesting that the 'ordinary degree itself seems neither blamable nor praise-worthy'. This shows that a father, a son, or a brother 'who behaves to the correspondent relation neither better nor worse than the greater part of men commonly do, seems properly to deserve neither praise nor blame'. But when people show kindness or unkindness that is 'extraordinary and unexpected', they seem 'praise-worthy in the one case, and blamable in the other' (TMS, p. 80). Moral neutrality is a key part of the virtue of justice, which Smith identifies with refraining from harming another. A person who refrains from harming others, but shows no special benevolence, deserves neither moral praise nor blame. Justice is for Smith indispensable for any sort of human social life, and '[w]e may often fulfil all the rules of justice by sitting still and doing nothing' (TMS, p. 82).

7 The origin and development of moral sentimentalism

Westermarck on Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume

Throughout his writings, Westermarck readily recognises his debt to ‘the moralists of the emotional school’ (ER, pp. 117–118). As he puts it in the preface of the *Moral Ideas*, ‘the reader will easily find how much I owe to British science and thought – a debt which is greater than I can ever express’ (ODMI, p. vi). This chapter provides an overview of Westermarck’s perspective on the formation of the philosophical tradition linking morality to sentiments or emotions. The first part of the chapter discusses his relation to ‘the moral sense school’ (ER, p. 35), whose most prominent representatives were Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746). The second part of the chapter focuses on Westermarck’s debt to David Hume. In Westermarck’s published writings, references to his predecessors are largely of minor significance, but his lectures contain detailed accounts and critical assessments of their contributions to the development of the sentimentalist theory of moral judgement.¹

Westermarck on the moral sense

The sentimentalist line of thought in British moral philosophy originates in the early eighteenth-century theories of the moral sense, which developed in reaction to two positions. One was the Hobbesian view that human nature is fundamentally selfish and antisocial, and that our moral judgements are based entirely on self-interest. The other was moral rationalism, the view that moral distinctions are derived from reason alone (Gill, 2010; Turco, 2003). The concept of the moral sense was introduced in philosophical discourse by Shaftesbury’s ([1711] 1999) *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. While Westermarck

¹ Westermarck lectured on British, especially Scottish, moral philosophy for the first time in the mid-1890s. Between 1912 and 1932 he lectured on the British Enlightenment regularly in Finland. Westermarck’s survived lectures on Shaftesbury and Hutcheson contain a reference to the year 1931, but he most likely utilised them also in his earlier teaching. His lectures on Hume, delivered in 1913 at the University of Helsinki, consist of forty typewritten pages and cover Hume’s epistemology, philosophy of religion and moral philosophy. For general account of the moral and social thought of the Scottish Enlightenment, see Berry (1997); Broadie (2009).

recognises Shaftesbury's significance as a forerunner of moral sentimentalism, he emphasises that Shaftesbury's 'primary task was not to investigate the origin and nature of moral judgements, but to establish the objective characteristics of virtue'.² However, by grounding 'the nature of virtue' in the study of 'human nature' Shaftesbury detached virtue and moral goodness from the Christian doctrines and paved the way for secular ethics. Westermarck explains that Shaftesbury's view of virtue is inextricably linked to his conception of the universe as a large harmonious whole with a myriad of interdependent parts. All living creatures are adapted to pursue their own good, but they also contribute to the good of the species and the larger natural systems of which they are part. This great interdependence is depicted in endless harmony and beauty, and 'all creatures are only constituents of a large infinite unity'.³

In contrast to Hobbes, Shaftesbury argues that humans are also endowed with other-regarding affections that make us naturally social and tend to the public good. In Westermarck's words, human beings are, for Shaftesbury, 'by nature endowed with both selfish and social instincts'; they naturally pursue their own interests, but they are equally 'benevolent towards others'. According to Shaftesbury, virtue consists in a harmony or balance of these 'egoistic and altruistic tendencies'. It is usually the selfish tendencies that are excessive, but also the social ones may be too strong. However, when these instincts or tendencies are in balance, a specific reflective feeling arises in us, and Shaftesbury calls this 'reflex affection' the moral sense. Westermarck concludes that, for Shaftesbury, 'our moral judgements are thus based on a faculty that enables us to find and perceive the harmony which comprises virtue'. As the eye discerns colours and proportions and the ear distinguishes sounds, the moral sense detects the 'harmonious' and the 'dissonant' in our dispositions. It is essentially an 'emotional faculty', as Westermarck emphasises in various occasions. When the moral sense is properly cultivated, it perceives eternal and immutable moral truths that exist independently of all human minds. As a result, moral judgements would coincide in everyone with a sufficiently developed moral sense.⁴

When Westermarck proceeds to examine 'the scientific value of Shaftesbury's ethics' he reveals something essential about his approach to the history of moral philosophy. It is the perspective of an empirically oriented scholar seeking descriptive claims and hypotheses on moral psychology and behaviour which can be exposed to critical examination and further development. Above all, Westermarck regards the idea of balance between the egoistic and altruistic dispositions as a vague starting point for the study of moral evaluation. Shaftesbury suggested that we approve of their harmony, but 'the notion of harmony implies a certain

2 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 12.

3 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), pp. 175–176. For thorough discussion of Shaftesbury's ethics, see Gill (2006); Darwall (1995). Donald Levine (1995) outlines a more sociological account of Shaftesbury's place in the development of British social theory.

4 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), pp. 176–178, 189.

judgement already in itself'. 'What is the harmony between egoism and altruism that characterises virtue?' Westermarck asks and continues: 'How much should I suppress my egoistic dispositions and how much of my altruistic dispositions?' This is the gist of Shaftesbury's theory of virtue, but for Westermarck, a clear and definite answer cannot be given by means of the notion of 'harmony'.⁵

In addition, Shaftesbury gave the benign and altruistic side of human nature considerably more weight than the self-interested tendencies. Westermarck argues that considering Shaftesbury's main focus was upon virtue, this is understandable insofar as 'we attach epithets "good" or "virtuous" primarily to altruistic actions – a circumstance which in my opinion is due to the fact that the moral emotions which are the basis of moral values are retributive emotions of approval or disapproval'. We experience these emotions mainly 'when a person performs an action that affects the lives and interests of others, whereas we are not as concerned with actions which affect the agent's own interests alone'. However, while Shaftesbury spoke of the harmony of affections, he failed to show why the egoistic tendencies would influence morality in such a minor degree. Recall also Westermarck's view that moral disapproval or indignation plays a much more dominant and active role in morality than moral approval. These are the facts Shaftesbury failed to grasp in his 'moral optimism' and 'overestimation of the altruistic nature of human beings'.⁶

Hutcheson's moral sense theory

Where Shaftesbury referred to the moral sense 'without special emphasis', Westermarck emphasises that Hutcheson made the moral sense the cornerstone of his moral philosophy. As Westermarck points out, Hutcheson's notion of the moral sense is connected with his overall doctrine of human senses. Hutcheson proposes that, in addition to the five senses of sight, hearing, taste and so on, there are various 'internal senses'.⁷ These senses denote the way in which the mind receives ideas independently of the will and through which we experience the feelings of pleasure and pain (Hutcheson, [1728] 2002, p. 17). Westermarck's lectures focus on Hutcheson's posthumous *A System of Moral Philosophy*, where he suggests that humans are endowed with the sense of beauty and harmony, the sympathetic sense, the social sense, the conjugal and parental sense, the sense of honour, the senses of decency and dignity, the religious sense and the moral sense.⁸

Each of these internal senses, Westermarck continues, implies a certain 'determination of the will'. By this, Hutcheson refers to our basic desires for our own happiness and that of others. In Westermarck's words, '[i]n human nature, there

5 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), p. 180.

6 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), pp. 180–181, 187.

7 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), p. 188–190. In the descriptive part of his lecture on Hutcheson, Westermarck draws largely on Leslie Stephen's (1876) *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*.

8 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), p. 189; Hutcheson ([1755] 2015, pp. 15–21, 24–29, 33–37).

are thus both selfish and altruistic instincts, as we would put it, and they are fully independent of one another'. Also these desires are for Hutcheson 'internal senses', as well as other psychological phenomena that Westermarck would rather call 'instincts or emotions'. All these senses and tendencies make the human nature a kind of machine which innumerable purposeful structures affirm the existence of the divine designer.⁹ As Luigi Turco (1999) puts it, pleasures and pains we receive through 'the bodily senses are given to us in order to survive as individuals', whereas 'the pleasures and pains of the internal senses are given to us by the wise Author of nature in order to survive as members of a community'. Self-love or self-interest 'is the ultimate principle that governs the individual in order to ensure his own survival. Benevolence is an ultimate principle that governs us as members of the social body' (pp. 80–81).

As noted, one of these internal senses is the moral sense. How, then, does the moral sense operate? It is a fully independent faculty that cannot be resolved into simpler elements. The moral sense is *sui generis* and cannot be explained by means of other psychological facts.¹⁰ As Westermarck puts it, Hutcheson argued that 'we approve of a good action and disapprove of an evil action. The good action arouses in us immediate pleasure and the evil action arouses immediate pain'. In other words, 'due to our moral sense, we immediately feel pleasure when observing virtuous actions and pain when observing evil actions'. We approve and disapprove regardless of the effects these actions have on ourselves, as well as without any thought of divine rewards and punishments. The moral sense perceives vice and virtue as the eye perceives light and darkness, and is thus independent of experience, habit and education.¹¹ Importantly, actions that give rise to the feeling of moral approval are motivated by benevolence and promote the happiness of others. Consequently, for Hutcheson, 'our moral sense proves that the essence of virtue consists in benevolence' (ER, p. 36).

According to Westermarck's reconstruction, Hutcheson assumed that 'the moral sense approves only of actions that promote the general welfare, and disapproves of those that conflict with the general welfare'. The moral sense evaluates human actions in accordance with the happiness they produce, and Hutcheson initiated the utilitarian doctrine 'that action is the best which procures the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. Westermarck concludes that because the Hutchesonian moral sense approves of actions that spring from benevolent tendencies and affections, the object of moral assessment is always the agent's character. This shows that we do not attach moral praise to useful actions that are performed out of selfish motives. Thus, strictly speaking, the moral sense approves only of benevolent dispositions and disapproves of selfish dispositions.¹²

9 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), pp. 189–190.

10 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), p. 190; Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 12.

11 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), pp. 190–192.

12 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), pp. 191–192.

Westermarck believes that Hutcheson ‘developed ethics a step forward’, above all, by emphasising ‘the distinction between the moral sense and reason’. This refers to the series of arguments by which Hutcheson sought to prove that moral judgement is affective. In stressing the connection between moral judgements and the feelings of approval and disapproval, Hutcheson ‘introduced new elements to moral philosophy, which proved to be important for David Hume and Adam Smith’.¹³ However, when Shaftesbury and Hutcheson argued that ‘the morality or immorality of conduct is discriminated by a special sense “implanted” in us for this purpose’ (ER, p. 35), they were making the moral sense a ‘mysterious’ and ‘metaphysical construction’.¹⁴ Westermarck also mentions the often-expressed view that the whole term is misleading because ‘this supposed “faculty” not only lacks a bodily organ, but its perceptions lack the uniformity which characterises our perceptions under similar physiological conditions’ (ER, p. 36).

In Westermarck’s appraisal, Hutcheson failed to realise that the moral sense is nothing but ‘our tendency to experience the moral emotions of approval and disapproval’. The functions of the moral sense ‘fall thoroughly to the domain of feeling’, which was the case also with Shaftesbury. Hutcheson attributed our virtue and vice related pleasures and pains to the moral sense, but Westermarck argues that these moral approvals and disapprovals are *emotions*. In other words, they differ from the feelings of pleasure and pain in that they are ‘mental states in which the conative element comprises the essential constituent’. This means that these emotional reactions involve at least some desire to reward or punish another person. This is a point emphasised by Hutcheson’s disciple Adam Smith, who thereby ‘took moral psychology a long step forward’.¹⁵

Another shortcoming of Hutcheson’s moral philosophy is the view that approval and disapproval of the moral sense are irreducible and cannot be analysed into simpler constituents. As we have seen, for Westermarck, moral disapproval and approval form a special class of emotions that can be called the moral emotions. However, the former is a species of ‘resentment’ and akin to anger and revenge, and the latter is a species of ‘retributive kindly emotion’ and akin to gratitude. This proves that the moral emotions have their roots in mental phenomena that fall outside the sphere of the special ‘moral sense’ postulated by Hutcheson.¹⁶ Thus we are back to Westermarck’s naturalistic explanation of moral emotions, showing their links to nonmoral retributive emotions and, further, similar phenomena in other animal species.

Hume’s moral psychology

Westermarck’s (1925) biographical writings reveal that he developed enthusiasm for David Hume as an undergraduate in the early 1880s. In particular, Westermarck

13 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), pp. 188, 192.

14 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), p. 192.

15 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), pp. 192–193.

16 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), p. 193.

commended Hume's epistemology, but he acknowledged Hume's achievements also as a founder of political economy, comparative religion and cultural history.¹⁷ It is often noted that the main influences on Westermarck's moral theory are David Hume, Adam Smith and Charles Darwin.¹⁸ G. H. von Wright argues that with respect to the history of British moral thought, it is not an exaggeration to say that 'Westermarck rediscovered Hume and Smith after a century dominated first by utilitarian and then by evolutionary ethics'. As Von Wright points out, Westermarck's views on moral objectivism and the truth-value of moral judgements, in particular, reveal 'far-reaching and often striking similarities' to Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (von Wright, 1982, p. 48).¹⁹

Westermarck placed great value on Hume's conception of ethics as a descriptive enterprise. Instead of conducting a normative project, Hume 'seeks to explain and understand [moral] phenomena as shaped by human psychological nature'. Thus, for Westermarck, Hume's approach belongs to 'psychological' or 'scientific ethics'. In his lectures on Hume, Westermarck also uses moral philosophy interchangeably with 'moral psychology'. At the same time, he points out that efforts to explain moral beliefs rather than to lay down rules for action are also found in the work of Hume's sentimentalist predecessors.²⁰

Second, according to Westermarck, Hume deserves great credit for grounding moral judgements in sentiments or feelings. Hutcheson paved the way for Hume by proposing that 'our moral concepts are derived from the fact that certain actions produce in us immediately pleasure and others immediately pain'. Accordingly, 'we feel pleasure when we contemplate a virtuous action and pain in the contemplation of a vicious action'. But where Hutcheson ascribed these feelings of approval and disapproval to the special moral sense, Hume rejected this postulate. In Hume's moral theory, 'the moral sentiments are not attributed to some specific faculty of the soul', which indicates a 'major advance'. Related to this, Hume argues that the moral sentiments are based on our sympathy with the feelings of others. Westermarck follows Hume's lead in this regard, but there are also significant differences between them. Finally, Hume saw that morality has evolved as part of human social life and that our capacity for self-evaluation is impossible without the social context.²¹

17 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), pp. 48, 50, 83.

18 See e.g. Stroup (1982a, pp. 126–127); von Wright (1982, pp. 29, 48–49) Edel (1982, pp. 79–80); Wolf (1995, p. 509).

19 On these themes in Westermarck, see Stroup (1981). As regards von Wright's comment on Westermarck's 'rediscovery' of Hume's moral philosophy, James Harris (2005) summarises the reception of Hume's moral theory in British moral philosophy by noting that 'little of interest is said about it in the nineteenth century'. During that period, 'Hume is taken to be an early architect of utilitarianism, and so is applauded by later exponents of that doctrine, and criticized by their enemies. He is sometimes praised for having shown that egoism and utilitarianism are distinct doctrines; he is regularly attacked for having failed to recognize the centrality to the moral life of actions done for the sake of duty alone' (pp. 314–315).

20 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), pp. 74, 80.

21 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 81.

Besides these considerations explicitly acknowledged by Westermarck, Hume's influence is evident in Westermarck's treatment of objectification of emotions as a major element in moral experiences. He must also have been very impressed by Hume's attempt to trace deep similarities in the psychological and especially emotional structure between humans and other animals.²² Moreover, as we saw in the previous chapter, Westermarck placed much value on Hume's account of moral responsibility. At the same time, for Westermarck, Hume's moral psychology contains two major flaws. The first concerns the prominent role Hume gives to considerations of social utility in how people make moral judgements. The second shortcoming is Hume's insufficient analysis of the nature of the moral sentiments on which our moral judgements are based.²³

In what follows, I first discuss Westermarck's examination of Hume's psychology of action which provides the basis for Hume's theory of moral judgement. In the second section, I outline Westermarck's perspective on Hume's moral subjectivism and his thesis of objectification. In the next section, I discuss the role of sympathy in Hume's theory of the moral sentiments and compare Hume's account with Westermarck's position. In the section that follows, I examine Hume's and Westermarck's views on self-evaluation. The end of the chapter concentrates on the points in Hume's moral theory that Westermarck considered the weakest. In this regard, I explore Westermarck's critique of Hume's emphasis on social utility. I also illustrate how similar outlooks are manifest in Westermarck's published writings. Finally, I conclude by re-evaluating Westermarck's reading and critique of Hume's account of the moral sentiments.

Feeling, volition and human action

According to Westermarck, Hume's moral philosophy is based on a 'thorough examination of human affections, passions, and acts of will'. For Hume, these constitute one province of the mind, while the other consists of sensations and ideas familiar from Hume's theory of knowledge. Westermarck explains that in the same way as Hume traces the operations of thought into impressions or sensations, the feelings of pleasure and pain constitute the basic elements of the emotional and volitional aspects of human psychology. Hume derives a whole range of affections and passions from these basic feelings. Thus, by charting 'the simple elements' that help to 'explain more complex phenomena', Hume 'wanted to provide a natural history of affections and passions'.²⁴ As discussed

22 See T, pp. 176–179, 324–328, 397–398; E, pp. 104–108. For discussions of Hume's comparisons between humans and animals, see Pitson (1993); Beauchamp (1999).

23 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 82.

24 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), pp. 54, 74–75. In the descriptive part of his lecture on Hume's moral philosophy, Westermarck draws heavily and often verbatim on Falckenberg ([1886] 1893) and Höffding ([1894] 1900). These works featured in the curriculum in philosophy at the University of Helsinki since their publication and remained there also during Westermarck's professorship (The Central Archives of the University of Helsinki: Curricula 1878–1928).

in Chapter 3, a similar procedure can be seen in Westermarck's theory of retributive emotions.

Pleasure and pain are for Hume 'the ultimate mainsprings of all human action'. Westermarck highlights the importance and originality of Hume's thesis concerning the emotional basis of volition or willing. In Hume's view, ideas and thoughts can motivate action only when associated with emotional experiences.²⁵ Here, Westermarck is referring to Hume's famous argument that 'reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will', and reason alone 'can never oppose passion in the direction of the will' (T, p. 413). Hume claims to prove, as phrased by Barry Stroud (1977), that 'in order to perform any action, or to be moved to perform it, we must be "affected" in some way or another by what we think the action will lead to'. In other words, 'we must in some way want or prefer that one state of affairs obtain rather than another if we are to be moved to bring about that state of affairs' (p. 156). Hume attacks the idea of the combat between reason and passion by making use of his distinction between calm and violent passions. All passions can be violent or calm. When passions motivating us 'are calm and cause no disorder in the soul', we readily misjudge our actions as governed by reason, although in reality it is the calm passions that are at work (T, p. 417).²⁶

Westermarck's position on the relationship between feeling and volition bears a close resemblance to Hume's. By examining this topic, it is also possible to shed light on Westermarck's relation to certain utilitarian assumptions. G. H. von Wright (1965) points out that when Westermarck argues that retributive emotions are directed towards the causes of pleasure or pain, these feelings serve as the ultimate foundations of moral judgements. According to von Wright, since Westermarck did not pay enough attention to this issue, it is not completely clear how his ethical theory relates to different utilitarian and hedonistic doctrines.

As discussed in previous chapters, Westermarck considered pleasure and pain as fundamental psychological facts. Broadly speaking, these feelings denote the agreeable or disagreeable ways in which different sensations and ideas affect the individual. In Westermarck's view, 'the feeling of pain or pleasure, however faint it may be, always lays the foundation for volition'. This is because our volitions are always related to ideas or images of what we want. These ideas or images, in turn, are associated with feelings that are either pleasant or unpleasant. Consequently, feelings that we *actually and presently experience* produce volitions because our thoughts are always more or less emotionally coloured. Like Hume, Westermarck argues that although cognitive processes are often considered as nonemotional, the emotional component is always involved since feelings may be faint and unnoticeable.²⁷ Similarly,

25 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 75.

26 For further discussion on Hume's account of passions and the will, see Penelhum (2009).

27 Westermarck (1915) (Box 80: Lectures, Psychology II), pp. 149–150.

Westermarck explains in his sociology lectures that when we act intentionally, the aim of the act is not a prospect of pleasure or avoidance of pain, but an idea or image. Human action is influenced by pleasure or pain associated with the idea of an end, because our thoughts always involve some kind of experience of these basic emotional reactions. However, Westermarck emphasises that this position differs from the utilitarian doctrine that we are always motivated by the thought of gaining pleasure, or avoiding pain, *in prospect* (Westermarck, 1894, pp. 34–35).

Westermarck's way of using pleasure and pain in his mature theory of moral emotions bears similarity to Hume's account of the passions. As noted, Hume argues that all passions arise from the experiences of pleasure or pain. Similarly, as we saw in Chapter 3, Westermarck regards these feelings as constitutive elements of all emotions, including the retributive emotions in which his moral theory is built. In addition, pleasure and pain are at the heart of Westermarck's account because our retributive emotions are 'always reactions against pain or pleasure felt by ourselves' (ODMI, p. 108; ER, p. 96). For this reason, '[i]n our moral consciousness pleasure and pain certainly play a dominant role, in so far as moral approval is a friendly attitude of mind towards a person as a cause of pleasure, and moral disapproval a hostile attitude of mind towards a person as a cause of pain' (ER, p. 260).

However, Westermarck's view on the significance of pleasure and pain in how moral emotions arise 'has nothing whatever to do with the psychological question of pleasure and pain as *motives of action*'. In order to clarify his position, Westermarck points out that 'the doctrine of psychological hedonism', which assumes that 'volition is always determined by pleasure or pain actual or prospective', is erroneous. He explicitly rejects the hedonistic theory of motivation, which claims that 'the motive of all action is the desire to feel pleasure or avoid pain' (ER, pp. xiv, 259–260, emphasis added). Jeremy Bentham, the founder of the utilitarian philosophy and psychology, believed that all human action is motivated by pleasure and pain 'in prospect'. In this view, action is always based on imagined expectations about the future (Bentham, [1823] 1907; Crimmins, 2014). But for Westermarck, it is obvious that an 'act may be desired though it is not known by the agent to be attended with pleasure' (ER, p. 259). Although Westermarck believes that pleasure and pain provide the basis of volition, he argues on a looser and less deterministic position than Bentham. These feelings influence human behaviour via cognitions, but this does not mean that people always and in all circumstances seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Moral subjectivism and objectification

Hume's psychology of action is, according to Westermarck, of direct importance for his moral theory, because it contains an answer to the question whether moral judgements are based on reason or feeling. For Hume, the operations of reason are confined to discovering relations of ideas and matters of fact. This means that

moral judgement arises only when an observation or idea of an action gives rise to an emotional reaction.²⁸ Thus, Westermarck says,

It is only because our feelings have been set in motion that we call anything good or evil. The moral qualities such as good and evil are thus valid only from the standpoint of sentient beings, just as sense perceptions only possess validity from the standpoint of sensing creatures.²⁹

Consequently, moral judgements lack objective validity. By this, Westermarck means that they do not represent a mind-independent state of affairs, but are analogous with sense perceptions which do not ‘correspond any objective circumstances’ in the external world.³⁰ In the *Treatise*, Hume makes clear that goodness or evilness is not in the act itself, any more than colours, tastes or smells are qualities of objects. Instead we consider acts good or evil, virtuous or vicious, only because they produce in us a certain kind of sentiment (T, pp. 468–469). An essential part of Westermarck’s understanding of Hume’s moral subjectivism is that this does not in any way deprive morality of its value and importance to the human condition. As Westermarck puts it, ‘[i]n practice we use the moral valuations with as much confidence as we avail ourselves of our sensations. Neither of them expresses any objective circumstances, but we *ascribe* objectivity to them, and practically speaking we can hardly fail to do so’.³¹

Echoing Hume, Westermarck argues in the *Moral Ideas* that just as the human mind is structured so that we hear sounds, see colours and perceive the temperature, we have evolved to experience human action and interaction morally. For this reason, it is impossible to step outside morality:

Our moral consciousness belongs to our mental constitution, which we cannot change as we please. We approve and we disapprove because we cannot do otherwise. Can we help feeling pain when the fire burns us? Can we help sympathising with our friends? *Are these phenomena less necessary, less powerful in their consequences, because they fall within the subjective sphere of experience?*

(ODMI, p. 19, emphasis added)

This brings us back to Westermarck’s thesis of objectification discussed in Chapter 3. His account is conspicuously indebted to Hume (Stroup, 1981, 1984).³² Hume argues famously that ‘the mind has a great propensity to spread

28 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 75.

29 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), pp. 75–76.

30 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 76.

31 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 76.

32 John Mackie, too, recognises Westermarck as the successor of Hume’s theory of objectification (Mackie, 1980, pp. 71–72). Elsewhere, Mackie (1967) praises the ‘radical importance’ of Westermarck’s appeal to objectification, ‘for it undermines all attempts to support ethical objectivism

itself on external objects' (T, p. 167) and that we 'gild' and 'stain' actions and character traits 'with the colours borrowed from internal sentiment' (E, p. 294). Thus, Hume says,

when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind.
(T, p. 469)³³

Like Hume, Westermarck compares moral emotions to sensations which are also attributed as the qualities of objects. People pronounce 'certain acts to be good or bad on account of the emotions those acts aroused in their minds', just as they call 'sunshine warm and ice cold on account of certain sensations which they experienced' (ODMI, p. 4). Similar objectification takes place in aesthetic judgements. Quoting Hume's essay 'Of the Standard of Taste', Westermarck states on various occasions that beauty is no quality in things themselves, but exists merely in the mind which contemplates them (HHM, p. 257; ODMI, p. 8; ER, p. 48).

Sympathy and the moral sentiments

As we have seen, one of the central issues in Westermarck's ethics concerns the nature and characteristics of moral emotions. Not surprisingly, he pays attention to the same question in Hume. First, Westermarck asks, what kind of feeling or sentiment constitutes the basis of moral judgement? According to Hume, moral judgements are based on a *pleasing and disinterested sentiment of approbation*. What, then, are the 'actions or qualities' that arouse in us the sentiment of moral approbation? These qualities or actions all share a common feature: they are directly or indirectly useful to the agent or to others. Taking into account Hume's full argument, Westermarck adds that there are also qualities that arouse approval because they are agreeable to the person possessing the trait or to others.³⁴ These useful or agreeable qualities are what Hume calls 'virtues', defined simply as any quality of mind or character that 'gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation' (E, p. 289).

Westermarck strongly emphasises that in Hume's view, the main determinants of our moral approval are qualities that are useful to the agent or to others. Thus, 'pleasure and utility are, for Hume, the criterion of moral merit'.

by appealing to the meaning of moral terms and incidentally reveals Westermarck's firm grasp of essentials that are often obscured by the current preoccupation with the use of ethical language' (p. 285).

³³ For further discussion of objectification in Hume, see Stroud (2000); Kail (2007).

³⁴ Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 76.

Also, qualities that are agreeable or useful to the person who has them obtain their moral significance from the fact that they arouse approbation in other people even though these traits do not benefit them in any way. The disinterested character of moral approval shows that we admire traits and deeds of our enemies even though they are hurtful to us. For Hume, Westermarck concludes, these facts prove that the sentiment of moral approval does not spring from self-interest.³⁵

As is well known, Hume explains the origin of moral sentiments by means of sympathy. Westermarck expresses this by saying that ‘an inductive study of the sphere of moral phenomena’ reveals the crucial role of sympathy in moral judgments. In Hume’s moral theory, ‘[s]ympathy is the actual foundation of morality’ because it ‘induces us to feel pleasure in something which contributes the happiness of others and distress for something which inflicts harm’. Importantly, for Hume, ‘this pleasure and pain are the same as moral approval and disapproval insofar as they relate to actions and characteristics’.³⁶ This is a succinct way to express Hume’s view that we feel these sentiments only towards people’s qualities and actions as signs of these traits. As we saw in Chapter 6, this is an important resemblance between Hume and Westermarck.

From Westermarck’s perspective, one of Hume’s great achievements was to ground the moral sentiments in sympathy. Westermarck points out that one of the main goals of his *Moral Ideas* was to show that our emotions of moral approval and disapproval are, in a very substantial degree, connected with our capacity to sympathise with others.³⁷ In order to see how Westermarck’s understanding of sympathy stands in relation to Hume’s, we must briefly consult Hume’s *Treatise* and *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*.

In the *Treatise*, sympathy refers to a psychological mechanism through which all kinds of passions and sentiments are communicated from one individual to another. According to Hume, when we observe emotional expressions in others, our minds spontaneously form an idea of this passion or sentiment. This idea is then turned into a feeling similar to what the other person is experiencing. We may also witness the situational causes that generally produce certain passions and infer through them the other person’s emotional state (T, pp. 316–317, 575–576). ‘No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathise with others’ (T, p. 316). Our capacity to sympathise takes us ‘out of ourselves’ and makes human minds ‘mirrors to one another’ (T, pp. 365, 579). Hume and Westermarck also share the view that sympathy is not unique to humans. As phrased by Hume, passions such as grief, fear, anger, courage and many others ‘are frequently communicated from one animal to another, without their knowledge of that cause, which produc’d the

35 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 77.

36 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 77.

37 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 81. Forget (2003) discusses the different manifestations of sympathy in the eighteenth-century human and natural sciences.

original passion' (T, p. 398).³⁸ In his later work *Enquiry*, Hume adopts a more straightforward approach to sympathy, but his account of sympathy remains substantially the same (Abramson, 2001; Vitz, 2004, 2016). Here, in addition to sympathy, Hume uses the terms 'fellow-feeling' and 'humanity' to refer to our capacity to share the feelings of others. He maintains that '[i]t is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or a fellow-feeling with others'. Because the examination of causes must stop somewhere, it was for him enough to note that '[n]o man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness and misery of others. The first has a natural tendency to give pleasure; the second, pain. This every one may find in himself' (E, pp. 219–220).

As noted above, Hume argues that the sympathetic feelings arise when we perceive or imagine the expressions of emotions in another person's appearance and behaviour. Westermarck too considered this as one of the main sources of sympathy. First, he observes that feelings of pleasure and pain may be transmitted from one person to another as a result of the 'close association that exists between these feelings and their outward expressions'. Using the same example as Hume, Westermarck explains that a 'sight of a happy face tends to produce some degree of pleasure in him who sees it' and 'the sight of the bodily signs of suffering tends to produce a feeling of pain' (ODMI, p. 109; ER, p. 96). Like Hume, Westermarck's view of the underlying psychological process is based on naturally occurring mental associations. The sympathetic 'feeling of the spectator is due to the fact that the perception of the physical manifestation of the feeling produces the feeling itself on account of the established association between them' (ER, p. 96; also ODMI, p. 109). Sympathetic feelings may also arise via another kind of mental association: 'Sympathetic pleasure or pain may be the result of an *association between cause and effect, between the cognition of a certain act or situation and the feeling generally produced by this act or situation*' (ODMI, p. 109; ER, p. 96, emphasis added). This is clearly akin to Hume's argument on witnessing the causes of other people's feelings and emotions.

Before taking a closer look at Hume's account of the moral sentiments, it is worth recalling that Westermarck distinguishes emphatically moral emotions from nonmoral retributive emotions. Like Hume, he stresses the disinterested character of moral approval and disapproval. This applies equally to first-person and observer perspectives. Simply put, moral emotions have the appearance of disinterestedness, because we feel that we would approve or disapprove the agent's action quite independently of its effect on our personal interests (ODMI, p. 101; ER, p. 90). In the first-person position, retributive emotions are disinterested when a person feels that 'his condemnation is not due to the particular circumstance that it is he himself who is the sufferer', but 'that his judgment would be the same if anybody else in similar circumstances had been the victim'

38 Westermarck discusses this kind of emotional contagion in animals in ODMI, p. 114 and ER, p. 106. For his accounts of sympathetic emotional reactions in animals, see ODMI, pp. 111–114; ODMI II, pp. 197–198; ER, pp. 98–103.

or the beneficiary (ER, p. 90). The same applies to moral praise. In reality, the feel of disinterestedness may be mixed with unconscious biases. To illustrate his point, Westermarck quotes Hume's remark that it is very common that we regard our enemy or rival vicious and blameworthy because our evaluations are influenced by the opposition of our interests (ER, p. 91; T, 472). As for the spectator perspective, due to sympathy, we are also capable of experiencing *vicarious and disinterested retributive emotions* when another person is benefitted or injured (ODMI, pp. 108–110; ER, pp. 95–97).

In the *Treatise*, Hume argues that the sentiment of moral approbation is a kind of pleasure, but that there are many different kinds of pleasure. Listening to music or drinking wine produces different kinds of pleasure, '[n]or is every sentiment of pleasure or pain, which arises from characters and actions, of that *peculiar* kind, which makes us praise or condemn' (T, pp. 471–472). As many Hume scholars have pointed out, he distinguishes moral praise and blame, approval and disapproval, from our more personal reactions to the characters and actions of others (Cohon, 1997; Korsgaard, 1999; Brown, 2008). Our moral judgements are based on the moral sentiments, and we feel these sentiments only when we contemplate a person's character traits 'in general, without reference to our particular interests' (T, p. 472). Moral sentiments arise when we consider the agent's character and action from a 'general point of view', which refers to the perspective of the person or persons most directly affected by the agent's character and action (T, pp. 581–582, 602–603).³⁹ As Norton and Kuehn (2006, p. 967) point out, for Hume, disinterestedness is the key element in moral approval and disapproval, and it is the principle of sympathy that makes vicarious and disinterested pleasure and pain possible.⁴⁰

Later on in the *Enquiry*, Hume illustrates this moral sphere of social reality even more clearly. When someone calls another person 'his *enemy*, his *rival*, his *antagonist*, his *adversary*', Hume explains that 'we readily understand that he speaks

39 For further discussion on the general point of view in Hume, see Sayre-McCord (1994); Korsgaard (1999); Brown (2001, 2008).

40 Hume's most explicit remarks about why we adopt the general point of view are of direct sociological interest. Hume held the general point of view as fundamental to human social intercourse. Because 'every particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others', it would be impossible to 'converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his peculiar point of view' (T, p. 581). Every day we 'meet with persons, who are in a different situation from ourselves', and it would be 'impossible men cou'd ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object' (T, pp. 591, 603). In order 'to prevent those continual contradictions' and to arrive at mutual understanding and cooperative interactions, 'we fix on some steady and general points of view, and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation' (T, pp. 581–582). It is our capacity to sympathise that enables us to take up the general point of view: 'The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners' (T, p. 603; E, p. 229). For further discussion on this matter, see Sayre-McCord (1994, pp. 213–220).

from the self-interested viewpoint'. We are capable of realising when a person expresses passions that are 'peculiar to himself, and [that arise] from his particular circumstances and situation'. However, when someone describes another person with 'the epithets of *vicious* or *odious* or *depraved*, he [...] expresses sentiments, in which he expects all his audience are to concur with him'. In order to feel moral sentiments, we must 'depart from [our] private and particular situation' and choose a 'common point of view' (E, p. 272).

In addition to disinterestedness, moral emotions for Westermarck are characterised by the appearance of impartiality and certain generality. With these features, Westermarck seeks to show that the moral emotions have the peculiar feel relating to how anyone ought to be treated. Hume and Westermarck are talking much about the same thing, but they seem to approach the issue from somewhat different perspectives. According to Westermarck, we feel moral emotions in a variety of situations, and the generalised viewpoint related to morality *results* from the nature of these emotions. Hume's position is less clear. At the beginning of *Treatise*, Hume says that moral sentiments can be experienced independently of the general point of view. Later on, however, Hume emphasises that in order to feel moral sentiments and to make moral judgements we must first adopt the general point of view (Gill, 2009, p. 588).⁴¹

Self-evaluation

Westermarck emphasises that sympathy plays a key role also in Hume's account of self-evaluation. For Hume, the habitual tendency to judge the actions of others gives rise to another habit of considering our own actions from the viewpoint of their effects on others. In Westermarck's reading of Hume, we are able to evaluate our own actions because 'we have learned through sympathetic feelings' to approve of actions promoting the good of others and to disapprove of the contrary kind. Westermarck stresses the importance of Hume's notion that 'conscience that teaches us the moral value of our own actions is thus not something which occurs originally in the individual, but is rather a product of sympathetic feelings which have their prerequisites in social life'.⁴² Thus, for Hume, conscience is a habitual tendency to view our own actions through the real or imagined reactions of others.

Westermarck's comment refers to Hume's account of pride, humility and reputation. As Paul Russell (1995) points out, Hume highlights on various occasions that 'our *self*-evaluations depend very largely on the judgments of others'. Pride is a pleasant passion, humility or shame is painful, and their importance for social and moral life derives from their role in self-evaluation. Pride and humility are self-directed passions linked to how our own characteristics and actions appear in the eyes of others (pp. 155–156, 165). Our self-directed moral judgements, in particular, 'are strongly affected by society and sympathy' (Hume, [1757] 2007,

41 For differing emphases on this issue, see Brown (2001); Garrett (2001).

42 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), pp. 77–78.

p. 14), which denotes our sympathy with the praise and blame of our associates (T, pp. 316, 320–321). The desire to be approved by people with whom we have contact and whom we appreciate, and the dread of their disapproval, are great motivations in human life:

By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently in review, and consider how they appear in the eyes of those who approach and regard us. *This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong*, and begets, in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others.

(E, p. 276, emphasis added)

In all this Westermarck found much to agree with Hume. In his view, Hume was fully correct in suggesting that in the development of the individual, self-evaluation is preceded by the more elementary phenomenon of passing judgements on others. Westermarck reads Hume as holding that our first judgemental reactions are not directed towards ourselves but towards other people. In this way, Hume rightly held self-evaluation as a ‘product of sympathetic feelings which have their prerequisites in social life’.⁴³ In other words, we are dealing here with our capacity to sympathise with feelings and emotions we ourselves evoke in other people. This suggests that the capacity for self-evaluation can develop only through social interaction and that self-directed moral emotions are impossible without the social context. When these remarks are read in the light of Westermarck’s published writings, it becomes clear that in his view, the temporal primacy of the other-directed retributive emotions applies also to the evolutionary history of human moral emotions.

Westermarck stresses that ‘the moral consciousness’ is not ‘at its origin engaged in self-estimation’ (ODMI, p. 123; ER, p. 113). As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, for Westermarck, the moral emotions are ‘of extreme antiquity in the human race’ and among early humans, they were ‘felt unanimously by a body of men’ or ‘society at large’. Because ‘the earliest moral emotions were public emotions’, he argues that ‘the original form of the moral consciousness cannot, as is often asserted, have been the individual’s own conscience’ (ODMI, pp. 117–118, 123–124; also ER, pp. 109, 112–113). Instead, Westermarck assumes that during human evolution, the capability for self-evaluation developed ‘circuitously [. . .] through a prior critique upon our fellow-men’. The emotions of self-approval and remorse are impossible ‘unless the idea of morality had been previously derived from another source’, through observing and feeling retributive emotions towards other people (ODMI, pp. 123–124; ER, pp. 112–113). Westermarck is surprisingly silent about the possible evolutionary logic behind self-directed retributive emotions. However, given his account of the origin of retributive emotions, we

43 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), pp. 77–78, 81.

may assume that he viewed emotions related to self-evaluation as contributing to the regulation of one's own behaviour in order to avoid costly social punishment in the conditions of close-knit social groups characterised with strong mutual dependence.

The importance of social utility for moral judgements

As we saw above, Hume proposed that the moral sentiments arise from our sympathy with the pleasant or unpleasant effects the agent's actions and characteristics have on others or the agent herself. In Westermarck's words, it is specifically through the 'sympathetic feelings' that Hume's focus in the study of moral evaluation 'shifts from the individual to society'. Hume's ethical investigations focus on the social virtues and especially on justice. According to Hume, Westermarck continues, social virtues are based on the fact that 'we consider such actions as right which promote the good of the society as a whole'. In Hume's moral theory, the main determinant of moral judgements is not the 'good of the individual' but the 'good of the society'. People largely approve of what they consider useful to society, and it is through our sympathetic feelings that we take interest in the good of society. Correspondingly, human beings largely disapprove of what they consider harmful to common good or society.⁴⁴

Hume stresses the importance of social utility more strongly in the *Enquiry* (Rosen, 2003). In his view, the 'characters which engage our approbation are chiefly such as contribute to the peace and security of human society', and 'the characters which excite blame are chiefly such as tend to public detriment and disturbance' (E, p. 102). Simply put, social virtues are qualities in persons that 'produce pleasure, because they are useful to society' (E, p. 261). Thus:

It appears to be matter of fact, that the circumstance of *utility*, in all subjects, is a source of praise and approbation: That it is constantly appealed to in all moral decisions concerning the merit and demerit of actions: That it is the *sole* source of that high regard paid to justice, fidelity, honour, allegiance, and chastity: That it is inseparable from all the other social virtues, humanity, generosity, charity, affability, lenity, mercy, and moderation: And, in a word, that it is a foundation of the chief part of morals, which has a reference to mankind and our fellow creatures.

(E, p. 231)

As we have seen, according to Hume, our capacity to sympathise is the source of our moral approval and disapproval of the effects virtuous and vicious character traits and actions have on others, whether members of our own community or people of distant ages and remote countries. In this way, sympathy or humanity enables us to express 'a general approbation of what is useful to society, and blame

44 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), pp. 78–79.

of what is dangerous and pernicious' (E, p. 266). This leads us to Hume's view of the role of reason in moral evaluation. Westermarck specifies that although sympathy provides Hume the basis of moral judgement, it is through reason that we realise what kinds of actions are beneficial for society.⁴⁵ As Hume puts it, because 'characters which engage our approbation are chiefly such as contribute to the *peace and security of human society*', whereas 'characters which excite blame are chiefly such as tend to *public detriment and disturbance*', it can be concluded 'that the *moral sentiments arise, either mediately or immediately, from a reflection of these opposite interests*' (E, p. 102, emphasis added). Reason alone 'can instruct us in the tendency of qualities and actions, and point out their beneficial consequences to society and to their possessor'. But reason alone cannot produce a moral judgement (E, pp. 285–286).

Finally, Westermarck states that, according to Hume, what people consider useful for society depends upon the prevailing social conditions. Although 'the conceptions of morality vary among different peoples', Hume suggests that these conceptions, 'in each case, originate from the same principle'. According to Hume, Westermarck concludes, 'what people consider and call good or evil is, for the most part, what they consider useful or harmful for the public, for the society'. This is the '*principle of morals*' which 'is the same everywhere'.⁴⁶

Westermarck's critique of Hume

Westermarck argues that Hume's moral theory, despite its many merits, was seriously weakened by his 'psychological utilitarianism'.⁴⁷ This concerns Hume's view that people approve of characteristics and actions that benefit the agents themselves, some other person or persons or the society in general. In this regard, Westermarck stresses Hutcheson's influence on Hume. As Westermarck puts it, Hutcheson proposed that 'we approve of dispositions and actions that promote the general welfare, and we disapprove of those that conflict with the general welfare'.⁴⁸ Also in his lectures on the moral-sense theorists, Westermarck highlights Hutcheson's role as a 'precursor of Hume and utilitarianism'. Hutcheson argued that 'the criterion of right' employed universally in moral evaluation is the 'action's tendency to promote the general welfare' in accordance with the principle of 'the great happiness for the greatest number'. Thus, according to Westermarck, although Hume wisely rejected Hutcheson's moral-sense-based 'explanation of the *origin* of moral judgements', he erred in adopting Hutcheson's utilitarian 'criterion of morality'.⁴⁹

45 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 79.

46 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 79.

47 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 82.

48 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), pp. 80–82.

49 Westermarck (1931) (Box 79: Lectures, Philosophy of the Enlightenment), p. 194. A similar remark on Hume's debt to Hutcheson is provided by Leslie Stephen (1876, pp. 61–62). Hutcheson's

Westermarck was very unsatisfied with Hume's view that we mainly approve of character traits and actions we conceive as beneficial for society, while disapproving of those we consider detrimental. By doing this, Hume overestimated the role of 'human calculation' in moral evaluation.⁵⁰ Westermarck tells his students that

I recall vividly my silent opposition when I read Hume's explanation of the origin of various concepts of virtue; he finds social utility everywhere, even when it is a matter of moral valuations that obviously are based on *pure expressions of emotions without any thought of what is most beneficial to society*, as is the case, e.g., with many issues which belong to the sphere of sexual morality.⁵¹

This reveals another important difference between Hume and Westermarck. As discussed in Chapter 3, Westermarck believed that moral emotions are not always based on sympathy, because in many cases moral disapproval can be traced to emotional aversions. In his view, even when our moral disapproval stems from our sympathy with the person wronged, the question is rather about our *immediate emotional reactions to the circumstance of that particular person*, not considerations of the benefit of the society. 'In this simple combination of resentment and sympathy we have a fact of extreme importance for the moulding of the moral consciousness, – *infinitely more important than any calculation as regards social utility*' (Westermarck, 1898, p. 306, emphasis added). More specifically, Westermarck regards appeals to social utility as post hoc rationalisations of emotional responses, because people very often appeal to 'utilitarian pretexts to support moral opinions or legal enactments which have originated in mere aversions' (ODMI II, p. 745). Similarly, when discussing institutional punishment, Westermarck argues that 'it is not to be believed that, in practice, the infliction of punishment is, or ever will be, regulated merely by considerations of social utility' (ODMI, p. 91). Rather,

The retributive desire is so strong, and appears so natural, that we can neither help obeying it, nor seriously disapprove of its being obeyed. The theory that we have a right to punish an offender only in so far as, by doing so, we promote the general happiness, really serves in the main as a *justification for gratifying such a desire, rather than as a foundation for penal practice*.

(ODMI, p. 91, emphasis added)

In his critique of Hume's emphasis on social utility, Westermarck sides with Adam Smith. As Smith puts it, people often react with indignation to 'the young

influence on Hume is much debated among Hume scholars (Moore, 1995, 2007; Norton, 2005; Turco, 2007; Tolonen, 2013).

50 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 82.

51 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 82, emphasis added.

and the licentious' whose conduct seems to ridicule 'the most sacred rules of morality'. However, although it is their 'hatefulness and detestableness, which originally inflames us against them, we are unwilling to assign this as the sole reason why we condemn them'. We are reluctant to admit that we condemn them 'merely because we ourselves hate and detest them'. People tend to rationalise the emotional reactions that precede moral judgements, 'and the consideration which first occurs to us, is the disorder and confusion of society which would result from the universal prevalence of such practices' (TMS, pp. 89–90). As Haakonssen (1981) points out, Smith maintains that even when people disapprove of actions that cause direct harm to others, 'social utility is rarely thought of by the bulk of mankind' (p. 88). For Smith, our moral sentiments are always passed upon the pleasant or painful effects actions have 'upon particular individuals, not the more remote effects upon society at large' (Raphael & Macfie, 1982, pp. 13–14).⁵²

There are, however, three contexts where Westermarck gives social utility a more contributory role in social and moral practices. These are (1) the transformation of social customs into laws, (2) the replacement of private revenge and blood feud with formal systems of punishment and (3) the emergence of property rights. In the first case, Westermarck argues that when customs are transformed into laws, they become 'expressly formulated' and 'enforced by a more definite sanction'. For Westermarck, '[i]t seems that the process in question arose both from considerations of social utility and from a sense of justice' (ODMI, p. 165).

In the second case, Westermarck suggests that conceptions of public utility have influenced the gradual process leading to the emergence and institutionalisation of judicial and executive powers. His starting point is the idea that '[f]or every society it is a matter of great consequence that there should be peace between its various members'. In private revenge and blood feud the agents are either personally involved in the conflict or belong to the immediate circle of the person wronged, so the retributive emotions motivating revenge tend to be strong. For this reason, punishment has a tendency to exceed the limits fixed by custom, which in turn prompts a counter-retaliation. In other words, these practices have 'a tendency to cause disturbance and destruction', which is, in the long run, 'injurious both to the families implicated in the feud and to society as a whole'. Therefore, 'some method of putting a stop to the feud will readily be adopted' and one solution is to let an independent body determine the appropriate punishment. In this way, 'by slow degrees [...] revenge has yielded to punishment, and the private avenger has been succeeded by the judge and the public executioner of his sentence' (ODMI, pp. 182–183).

Finally, a reflection of common interest or social utility is one of the circumstances which have made 'interference with other persons' possessions the subject of moral censure'. Besides the psychological causes discussed in Chapter 5, Westermarck raises three overlapping factors underlying the genesis of moral norms

52 For Smith's critique of Hume's account of utility as the foundation of moral evaluation, see Raphael (1972–1973); Haakonssen (1981, pp. 67–74); Martin (1990); Rosen (2000).

against theft. First, there is the effect of child rearing: 'From both prudential and altruistic motives parents taught their children to abstain from such interference, and this, by itself, would readily give rise to the notion of theft as a moral wrong'. Prudential motives refer to an understanding of the potentially dangerous consequences of such actions, both to the offspring and the family. Altruistic motives, on their part, refer to the parents' affection and solidarity towards other members of the community. Second, '[s]ociety at large also tried to prevent acts of this kind, *partly in order to preserve peace and order*, partly out of sympathy with the possessor'. Here, the collective attempt to preserve peace and order within the community is the closest Westermarck gets to the considerations of public good. Collective sympathy refers again to the Smithian argument regarding the immediate emotional reactions to the victim's emotions, that is, that '[r]esentment is felt not only by him who is deprived of his possession, but by others on his behalf' (ODMI II, pp. 52, emphasis added).

What kind of sentiments are the moral sentiments

According to Westermarck, the most serious flaw in Hume's moral psychology is his inadequate analysis of the moral sentiments. Contrary to what Hume seems to suggest, Westermarck stresses that moral approval and moral disapproval are not merely feelings of pleasure and pain. Instead, they are reactive emotions aroused by acts of will and whose essential characteristic is the desire to reward or punish the person they are directed at. Despite Hume's insurmountable achievements in epistemology, Westermarck holds that as 'moral psychologist', he was overshadowed by his younger friend Adam Smith. This is largely because Hume 'did not analyse the moral emotions with sufficient sharpness or profundity to discover their retributive nature, which at once throws light on many of the otherwise dark corners of the moral consciousness'.⁵³

Westermarck's account of Hume's theory of the moral sentiments does not necessarily do full justice to Hume's thinking. Hume states already in the introduction to the *Enquiry* that his aim is to expose the qualities of mind or character which make a person 'an object either of *esteem and affection*, or of *hatred and contempt*' (E, pp. 173–174, emphasis added). At the same time, Hume is explicit that in the *Enquiry*, he does not treat the nature of the moral sentiments in more detail (E, p. 317). As we have seen, Hume believes that 'moral distinctions depend entirely on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure' (T, p. 574; also pp. 471, 591). But unlike Westermarck assumed, Hume observes that the moral sentiments are something more than mere pleasures and pains. Following

53 Westermarck (1913) (Box 78: Lectures, Hume), p. 82–83. In his review of the *Moral Ideas*, Samuel Alexander (1906) draws attention to this difference between Hume and Westermarck. In Alexander's view, Westermarck 'makes a real advance in insisting that the moral emotion is active, not a mere contemplative pleasure or pain at the sight of an act, but an impulse to resent injury and to support beneficence. This consideration is absent certainly from Hume' (p. 538).

Páll Árdal (1966, 1977), many Hume scholars have argued that Humean moral approval and disapproval are species of love and hatred.

Hume uses the terms love and hatred in a very general way. Love denotes a favourable feeling towards another person as a response to his or her character traits and actions. Hatred is the opposite of love and represents a hostile feeling towards another person. When we evaluate our own character traits and actions, our judgements depend on whether we feel pride or humility (shame) towards ourselves (Árdal, 1966, pp. 8–11, 18, 34). Hume and Westermarck share the view that many of the prerequisites of human moral sentiments are found in animal emotional life. In addition to sympathetic responses, Hume argues that all sentient animals feel love and hatred towards members of the same species. Animals may experience love even towards members of other species. Similarly, pride and humility ‘are not merely human passions, but extend themselves over the whole animal creation’ (T, pp. 326, 397–398).

An important distinction in Hume’s theory of the passions is between calm and violent passions. This is not a categorical distinction but concerns their usual intensity. Love and hatred are violent passions, but moral approval and disapproval are typically calm rather than violent. However, it was obvious for Hume that our moral sentiments may also be violent and intense, as when we face severe cases of cruelty or injustice (Árdal, 1977, pp. 409–413). In an important passage Hume says that the ‘pleasure or pain, which arises from the general survey or view of any action or quality of the mind, constitutes its vice or virtue, and gives rise to our *approbation or blame, which is nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred*’ (T, p. 614, emphasis added and deleted). The passions of love and hatred, pride and humility, figure significantly in the parts of the Book III of the *Treatise* where Hume explores the emotional origin of moral judgements (T, pp. 473, 575).

In some passages, Hume links love and hatred even more firmly to the desire to reward and punish their object. This is because love and hatred are closely associated with benevolence and anger. When discussing the human conception that virtue deserves reward and vice punishment, Hume suggests that this is due to the fact that ‘love or hatred, by the original constitution of human passion, is attended with benevolence or anger; that is, with a *desire of making happy the person we love, and miserable the person we hate*’ (T, p. 591, emphasis added). As summarised by Árdal (1966),

the pleasure or uneasiness that the contemplation of tendencies of actions produces leads us to love or hate (approve of or disapprove of) the agent. These passions are, by nature, closely allied to benevolence or anger, and this is why we think that virtue deserves happiness, and vice deserves to be punished.

(p. 129; see also Árdal, 1977, p. 415)⁵⁴

54 For Hume’s account of retribution, see Russell (1995, pp. 137–154).

On the other hand, even if our moral sentiments are nothing more than calm forms of love and hatred (T, p. 614), love and hatred are not in themselves equally retributive passions as benevolence and anger. Instead, love and hatred are ‘attended with benevolence or anger’ (T, p. 591). In the *Dissertation on the Passions*, Hume says the same by pointing out that the ‘passions of love and hatred are always followed by, or rather conjoined with, benevolence and anger’ (Hume, [1757] 2007, p. 18, emphasis added). However, by suggesting that love always manifests itself together with the ‘desire of happiness to the person beloved’, and ‘hatred produces a desire of the misery, and an aversion to the happiness of the person hated’ (Hume, [1757] 2007, p. 19), Hume was considerably closer to Westermarck’s understanding of the nature of moral emotions than he assumed. In this regard, the main difference between them is that Westermarck’s account of the moral emotions is less complex. For Westermarck, moral approval and disapproval are not ‘attended with’, ‘followed by’ or ‘conjoined with’ some other emotions of a more retributive character, but *they are in themselves retributive emotions*. In this, as we shall see in the next chapter, he was following closely in the footsteps of Adam Smith.

8 The Smithian roots of Westermarck's theory of morality

So far, we have seen that Adam Smith played a crucial role in the formative period of Westermarck's theory-building as well as his examination of moral responsibility. This chapter continues to examine Smith's influence on the key elements of Westermarck's theory of moral emotions. It is commonplace in the literature on Westermarck, both in his time and ours, to emphasise his debt to Smith. Similarly, for Westermarck (1900), Smith's 'ingenious hypothesis' of moral consciousness was supported by his own 'comprehensive study of the moral ideas of various nations and in various ages' (p. 185). Later on, he included Smith among 'the three writers who above all others have exercised an inspiring influence on my work in Sociology and Ethics', the other two being Darwin and James Frazer (Westermarck, 1928, p. 190).

Westermarck emphasises that Smith followed in many respect the work of his sentimentalist predecessors, and especially David Hume. There are, according to Westermarck, three main affinities. First, Smith's concern was to establish a descriptive and explanatory theory of morality along the lines of Hume's science of human nature. Second, Smith followed Hume in rejecting Hutcheson's doctrine of the moral sense. And third, like Hume, Smith analysed moral judgements as based on our sympathy with the emotions of others. Despite these affinities, Westermarck stresses that Smith was not reiterating 'Hume's moral psychology but advanced a theory of his own'.¹ Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is, for Westermarck, 'the most important contribution to moral psychology made by any British thinker' (ER, p. 71), and he states that 'I recognise with gratitude that of all moral philosophers or moral psychologists there is none from whom I have learned anything like as much as from Adam Smith'.² Westermarck also laments how difficult it is to produce a summary which does the work full justice. As he puts it, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* contains 'a great number of extraordinarily fine observations concerning the details' that Smith uses, together with

1 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 11–13. For comparison between Hume and Smith in these respects, see Haakonssen (1981, chapters 1–3); Raphael (2007, chapters 1–4); Sayre-McCord (2015).

2 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 21.

the continuous flow of examples, to illustrate his main ideas. For this reason, he focuses only on the outlines of 'Smith's moral-psychological theory'.³

This chapter begins by looking at Westermarck's view of the nature of Smith's moral philosophy. Second, I examine Smith's account of sympathy on which his moral theory is based, and analyse Westermarck's conception of sympathy in relation to Smith's. Third, I explore Smith's account of moral judgement and show that Westermarck's theory of moral emotions is based largely on simplifying Smith's work. In the section that follows, I analyse Westermarck's interpretation of another key element of Smith's moral theory, the notion of the impartial spectator. Finally, the chapter shows that Smith and Westermarck share a similar conception of the significance of emotions in scientific inquiry.

Nature of Smith's moral theory

Westermarck (1900) viewed Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as an attempt to formulate a moral-psychological theory on 'the root-principles of the moral consciousness' (p. 185). While many Smith scholars today read *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as a primarily descriptive project,⁴ this has not always been the case. As Knud Haakonssen and Donald Winch (2006) put it, '[f]or most of the two centuries since *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* stopped being read on the premises of Smith's contemporaries, the work has been seen as an exercise in normative moral psychology' (p. 380; see also Berry, 2013, pp. 15–17). In their view, 'the high point' of the descriptive and empirical use of Smith was reached by Westermarck, 'who developed it into a detailed socio-psychological theory of morality that could account for all the major features of morality' (Haakonssen & Winch, 2006, p. 382).

Westermarck admired Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (among other reasons) because its key premises are compatible with the basic principles of Darwinian evolutionary theory. However, unlike some later scholars, Westermarck was not making Smith a proto-evolutionist of some kind. He emphasises that Smith believed in a providential God as the initiator of all things.⁵ It was rather that Smith's deistic framework enabled him to look at human social behaviour in a way that makes sense also from the Darwinian perspective. There is no doubt that Westermarck would not agree with the contemporary scholars emphasising that 'the mention of God or Providence is not necessary to the argument of any empirical claim in TMS' (Fleischacker, 2004, p. 45).⁶

3 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 11.

4 See e.g. Campbell (1971, 2013); Raphael (2007); Haakonssen (1981, 2002); Barbalet (2005); Smith (2006); Broadie (2006); Philipson (2010). Other writers such as Griswold (1999) and Hanley (2009) emphasise the normative aspects of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and argue that Smith's essential aim is the subtle promotion of virtuous and moral conduct.

5 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 5–6. For discussions of 'proto-evolutionist' reading of Smith, see Hill (2001, pp. 17–18); Laurent & Cockfield (2007, 141–145).

6 See also Haakonssen (1981, pp. 74–7); Macfie (1967, chapter 6). Smith's views on religion and especially their implications for his moral-psychological and social scientific arguments have been disputed. For discussion, see Kleer (1995); Hill (2001); Kennedy (2013).

More specifically, Westermarck appreciated Smith's understanding of the adaptive significance of human passions and emotions. Smith observes that a variety of passions and emotions, both positive and negative, are shared between humans and animals (TMS, p. 28). These include the emotions of resentment and gratitude upon which Smith built his theory of moral judgement, consisting of what Westermarck (1900) regarded as 'mental facts easily explicable as results of natural selection' (p. 185). Westermarck also highlights Smith's observation that, both in humans and animals, retributive emotions serve protective functions. 'Exactly the same view', Westermarck adds, 'is taken by several modern evolutionists as regards the "end" of resentment, though they, of course, do not rest contented with saying that this feeling has been given us by nature, but try to explain in what way it has developed' (ODMI, p. 41).

Another example of Smith's naturalistic reasoning concerns parental altruism. As Westermarck puts it, Smith realised, 'a hundred years before' Darwin's *Origin of Species*, that parental affection and altruism towards offspring's are usually stronger than offspring's altruism towards their parents. This makes evolutionary sense because, Westermarck quotes Smith, 'the continuance and propagation of the species depend altogether upon the former, and not upon the latter' (ODMI II, p. 194; TMS, p. 142). All this comes back to Smith's nearly Darwinian-sounding premise that 'self-preservation, and the propagation of the species, are the great ends which Nature seems to have proposed in the formation of all animals' (TMS, pp. 77–78). In all organisms we see 'how every thing is contrived for advancing the two great purposes of nature, the support of the individual, and the propagation of the species' (TMS, p. 87). Westermarck's interpretation of Smith anticipates the recent endeavours to examine *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in the light of evolutionary and biological explanations of cooperation and morality.⁷ The background to this tendency is that, as Samuel Fleischacker (2004) puts it, Smith's 'accounts of how natural processes arise and function can always be cast in the language of evolution by natural selection – not, of course, that Smith had that language yet explicitly available to him' (p. 45).

Smith's account of sympathy

The Theory of Moral Sentiments opens with an analysis of sympathy. Human beings are for Smith equipped with what Westermarck terms an 'innate instinct' to imitate the expressions and gestures of others. This shows, for example, that the facial expressions of joy and grief tend to produce similar expressions in the spectator. Similarly, when we see an acrobat balancing on a rope, we involuntarily

⁷ The most informative neo-Darwinian discussions of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* are Haig (2011); Smith (1998); Brosnan (2011). During the rise of sociobiology, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was commented favourably by Ghiselin (1974, pp. 256–257) and Coase (1976, pp. 539–541; 1978, pp. 244–245). Much of the literature dealing with Smith's work from the contemporary evolutionary framework revolves around the controversial group selectionist theory of 'strong reciprocity' (Gintis, Bowles, Boyd & Fehr, 2005; Clark, 2009; Elster, 2011).

move and balance our bodies in the similar way as the acrobat does. Besides imitating the facial and bodily movements of others, Smith suggests that we have a tendency to feel similar emotions as the people we observe.⁸

At the beginning of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith points out that in colloquial language, sympathy refers to pity or compassion, 'our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others'. Within the framework of his moral theory, however, Smith uses sympathy in a broad sense to denote 'our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever' (TMS, p. 10; also p. 42). Thus, for Smith, sympathy means sharing any kind of feeling or emotion another person is experiencing.⁹ In view of Westermarck's theory of sympathy, it is important to note that Smith discusses two sources of sympathy or shared emotions. First, Smith observes that in some circumstances 'sympathy may seem to arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person'. When grief and joy, for example, are 'strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one', they 'at once affect the spectator with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion'. Emotions may thus be transmitted from one person to another 'instantaneously, and antecedent to any knowledge of what excited them in the person principally concerned' (TMS, p. 11). It is often noted that Smith probably has Hume's view of sympathy in mind here. As Westermarck points out, for Smith, however, our sympathetic emotions are always fainter if we only observe emotional expressions in others without knowing their cause.¹⁰ Smith points specifically to anger and resentment, which are essential for his theory of moral sentiments, as passions which 'excite no sort of sympathy [...] before we are acquainted with what gave occasion to them' (TMS, p. 11).

It is for this reason that Smith introduces the second and by far the most important source of sympathy. Actually, sympathy 'does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it' (TMS, p. 12). Since Hume does not discuss the other person's situation in more detail, Smith can be seen as broadening Hume's view of how sympathetic emotions arise (Broadie, 2006, p. 166). As emphasised by Fleischacker (2012), even when emotions such as joy or sorrow seem to be passed along infectiously, Smith insists that

the appearances are best explained by the fact that such facial expressions 'suggest to us the general idea of some good or bad fortune that has befallen the person' wearing them (TMS I.i.1.6, p. 8). Even when we see a smiling face, that is, we come to feel cheerful only because it suggests something to us about the situation of the smiling person.

(p. 280)

8 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 13.

9 For more detailed account of Smith's concept of sympathy, see Otteson (2002, pp. 17–18); Fleischacker (2012).

10 In his lectures and the *Moral Ideas*, Westermarck quotes with approval Smith's observation that 'general lamentations which express nothing but the anguish of the sufferer, create rather a curiosity to inquire into his situation, along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than actual sympathy that is very sensible' (TMS, p. 11; ODMI, p. 109).

The gist of Smith's theory of sympathy is that when we observe the emotions and actions of others, we spontaneously imagine what we ourselves would feel in the same situation. Consequently, Smith strongly emphasises the importance of imagination in the arousal of sympathy. His main focus is on sympathetic emotions that 'arise from an *imaginary change of situation with the person principally concerned*' (TMS, p. 317, emphasis added; also pp. 9, 19, 21). Since we are able to place ourselves imaginatively in the situation of others, it is possible to have emotions sympathetically without detecting them in other people. Westermarck retells Smith's example that we blush and feel shame for people who seem insensible of their improper behaviour, 'because we cannot help feeling with what confusion we ourselves should be covered, had we behaved in so absurd a manner'.¹¹

Westermarck's view of sympathy

In his published works, Westermarck's account of sympathy was originally provided in the chapter of the *Moral Ideas* titled 'The Origin of the Moral Emotions'. Although Westermarck does not bring out Smith's account of the causes of sympathy, it serves as the implicit starting point for his exploration of how moral emotions arise. As we have seen, for Westermarck, sympathy refers to the feelings and emotions, both positive and negative, that we feel as reactions to similar feelings and emotions in others. Westermarck deals with sympathy in connection with his analysis of why people feel retributive emotions on behalf of others. In other words, '[w]hy should we, quite disinterestedly, feel pain calling forth indignation because our neighbour is hurt, and pleasure calling forth approval because he is benefited' (ODMI, p. 108; ER, p. 96)? The treatment of this question is part of his more wide-ranging attempt to examine the specific characteristics of moral emotions.

Westermarck discusses three sources of sympathetic emotions. First, he observes that feelings of pleasure and pain may be transmitted from one person to another merely by means of their bodily expressions. The perception of feeling alone may thus arouse a similar feeling in the spectator (ODMI, p. 109; ER, p. 96). As discussed above, this is the first source of sympathy mentioned by Smith and the one that is central to Hume. Second, Westermarck suggests that the feelings of pleasure and pain may arise from observing acts and situations. He means that we, as spectators, anticipate the emotional reactions usually associated with certain acts or situations. Through this, Westermarck takes into account the situational aspects of sympathy much emphasised by Smith. Like Smith, Westermarck argues that it is through perceiving the situational context that we may sympathise with another without detecting a similar emotion in that person (ODMI, pp. 109, 114; ER, pp. 96, 106). In addition, Westermarck follows Smith when suggesting that our sympathetic emotions are intensified when both of these causes – the perception of emotional displays and their situational contexts – are

11 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 14; TMS, p. 12.

simultaneously producing the emotion (ODMI, p. 109; TMS, pp. 11–12). Third, we may be roused to retributive emotions by observing the signs of resentment or kindly emotions in others. It is typical that anger or resentment is transferred from one person to another without us being aware of the cause of the original emotion (ODMI, pp. 114, 117; ER, pp. 105–106, 108). In this respect, Westermarck differs substantially from Smith, who stresses that the behaviour of a furious person does not lead us to sympathise with his or her emotions ‘before we are acquainted with what gave occasion to them’. Unless we have knowledge of people’s situation, their fury and anger ‘serve rather to disgust and provoke us against them’ (TMS, p. 11).

Corrections to Smith’s theory of sympathy

Despite the affinities between Smith’s and Westermarck’s views of sympathy, there are at least two significant differences. The first concerns Smith’s notion that sympathy is founded upon the imaginative process where spectators put themselves in the other person’s shoes. Westermarck’s early theory of moral judgement was based on the idea of the imaginary change of places, but his mature writings suggest nothing like this. Instead, he analyses sympathy by way of mental associations. When we feel sympathetic pleasure or pain, these feelings are ‘the result of the *association between cause and effect, between the cognition of a certain act or situation and the feeling generally produced by this act or situation*’ (ODMI, p. 109; ER, p. 96, emphasis added). In other words, the perception of certain acts or situations alone causes us to associate them with certain emotional reactions, and thereby we feel them ourselves. As we shall see, this difference becomes more evident in Westermarck’s critique of Smith’s account of how moral judgements arise.

Another, even more noticeable difference concerns the nature and structure of sympathy. In his pioneering study *Adam Smith’s Science of Morals*, Tom Campbell (1971) places Westermarck among those who have confused Smith’s sympathy with pity or compassion, regarded as the motive of altruistic action. According to Campbell, ‘Westermarck thought Smith’s sympathy was “a conative influence to promote the welfare of others”’ (p. 94). This is, however, definitely not the case. As demonstrated above, Smith’s treatment of the two sources of sympathy was the implicit starting point for Westermarck’s exploration of how sympathetic emotions arise. Campbell ignores that Westermarck makes a clear distinction between sympathy as the transfer of feelings or emotions and ‘what is generally understood by sympathy’ (ODMI, p. 109). It is only after his treatment of the sources of sympathy discussed above that he proceeds to deal with sympathy in the ‘ordinary’, ‘common’ (ODMI, pp. 110–111) or ‘popular sense of the word’ (ER, pp. 96–97). And it is here that Westermarck distances himself further from Smith’s description.

In Westermarck’s view, sympathy in the Humean or Smithian sense is not sufficient for us to feel moral emotions on behalf of others. Westermarck develops their ideas of sympathy further by arguing that in order for moral emotions to arise, sympathetic emotional reaction ‘requires the co-operation of the altruistic

sentiment or affection' (ODMI, p. 110; ER, pp. 96–97). As discussed in Chapter 3, for Westermarck, altruistic sentiment denotes a benign attitude towards other living beings. Whenever Westermarck deals with the manifestations of moral emotions through sympathy, he means sympathetic reactions that involve the influence of altruistic sentiment. As Westermarck's concept of sympathy comprises both the sharing of other person's feeling or emotion and the influence of altruistic sentiment, he comes closer to the contemporary meaning of sympathy as compassion.¹²

Moral sentiments and two kinds of moral judgements

After discussing Smith's view of sympathy, Westermarck addresses what he calls Smith's 'theory of morality'. He explains that Smith uses sympathy to account for two kinds of moral judgements. These judgements are based on two distinct species of moral sentiments recognised by Smith. Smith's starting point is that when we observe someone acting in a certain way, we have a tendency to place ourselves in that person's situation. As a result, we experience the emotion we assume we would feel in the same situation. At the same time, we observe the agent's frame of mind and form an idea of the emotion that motivates his or her action. According to Smith, we approve of the action when the emotion we imagine we would feel in the same situation corresponds the agent's emotion, that is, when we sympathise with the emotion. On the other hand, we disapprove when the emotion we imagine we would feel differs from the emotion that motivates the agent's action.¹³ Smith identifies motives with emotions or passions which are involved in all human action. He also uses the terms 'sentiment', 'feeling', 'passion' and 'emotion' largely interchangeably.¹⁴

12 Westermarck's account of altruistic sentiment relates to Smith also because in the same context, he criticises Smith's argument on affections prompting altruistic interactions within the family or close kin. Their difference in view concerns the relationship between sympathy in Smith's sense and the emotional tendencies termed by Westermarck as the 'altruistic sentiment or affection'. Smith conceived our affections towards particular persons as the result of frequently felt fellow-feelings. According to Smith, as quoted by Westermarck, '[w]hat is called affection, is in reality nothing but habitual sympathy'. Because family members are 'usually placed in situations which naturally create this habitual sympathy, it is expected that a suitable degree of affection should take place among them'. That is to say, '[o]ur concern in the happiness or misery of those who are the objects of what we call our affections; our desire to promote the one, and to prevent the other; are either the actual feeling of that habitual sympathy, or the necessary consequences of that feeling' (TMS, p. 220). As we have seen, Westermarck suggests that the altruistic sentiment or affection 'is not merely willingness to sympathize', but, above all, 'a conative disposition to promote the welfare of its object' (ER, p. 97; also ODMI, pp. 110–111). There is a clear causal relationship between these psychological aptitudes, but for Westermarck, it is the *reverse* of what Smith suggested. According to Westermarck, 'affection is not, as Adam Smith maintained, merely habitual sympathy, or its necessary consequence'. Instead the altruistic sentiment 'must be regarded rather as the cause than as the result of' our willingness to sympathise (ODMI, p. 111).

13 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 14–15.

14 For discussion on Smith's theory of action and its emphasis on emotions, see Campbell (1971, pp. 64–66); Barbalet (2008, pp. 132–133).

These sentiments of moral approval and disapproval are the first species of moral sentiments recognised by Smith. They are the basis for moral judgements Smith calls the judgements of propriety and impropriety. As Raphael (2007) puts it, the question is of 'the simple judgement that an action is right or wrong', 'appropriate or inappropriate, suitable or unsuitable, to the cause that has prompted the agent to do it' (p. 14). In Westermarck's words, Smith suggests that 'we approve of an action when we sympathise with the agent's motive, and we disapprove when we do not sympathise with his motive'. Westermarck emphasises that 'it must be counted to Smith's credit that he emphatically brought out the agent's *motive* as the subject of moral judgement'. In Westermarck's view, this is an important difference between Smith and Hume, who 'fastened himself too much on the *external* act and its consequences'.¹⁵

The judgements of merit and demerit

Besides analysing the spectator's response to the emotions of the agent, Smith suggests that we place ourselves also in the position of the person acted upon. Through this, Smith analyses the spectator's response to emotions of the recipient. He focuses on two kinds of emotional responses, gratitude and resentment. They belong among 'the strongest and most vigorous passions of human nature' (TMS, p. 200) and are common to humans and animals alike (TMS, p. 28). Resentment and gratitude are 'counterparts to one another' (TMS, p. 76) and fundamental and constitutive elements of human and animal social behaviour: 'The causes of pain and pleasure, whatever they are, or however they operate, seem to be the objects, which, in all animals, immediately excite those two passions of gratitude and resentment' (TMS, p. 94).

Gratitude is, for Smith, the 'sentiment which most immediately and directly prompts us to reward, or to do good to another'. Resentment, in turn, is the 'sentiment which most immediately and directly prompts us to punish, or to inflict evil upon another'. What, then, constitutes the reward and punishment Smith is talking about? 'To reward is to recompense, to remunerate, to return good for good received. To punish, too, is to recompense, to remunerate, though in a different manner; it is to return evil for evil that has been done' (TMS, pp. 67–68).¹⁶

Resentment and gratitude are the basis of the second kind of moral judgements recognised by Smith. Besides the judgements of propriety or impropriety discussed above, there are judgements of merit and demerit, which concern whether we think that the agent deserves praise or blame, reward or punishment. Westermarck explains that when we observe someone performing a benevolent act, we put ourselves imaginatively in the shoes of the recipient. This prompts us to experience the emotion of gratitude. What happens is that we, as spectators, sympathise with the agent's emotion on the one hand and with the recipient's

15 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 14–15.

16 For Smith's account of punishment, see Stalley (2012).

gratitude on the other.¹⁷ According to Smith, in order for us to sympathise with the recipient's gratitude, we must also sympathise with the emotion that motivates the agent. It seems clear that if we do not approve the agent's motive as right and proper, we cannot sympathise with the beneficiary's gratitude. For example, if A helps B solely in order to benefit at their expense but B is not aware of this, we (knowing A's true motives) do not sympathise with B's gratitude.

But, as Westermarck points out, when we *sympathise both with the agent and the person acted on*, this kind of double sympathy leads to the final moral judgement. According to Smith, the moral approval we feel towards the agent strengthens because we sympathise also with the beneficiary's gratitude. More specifically, Westermarck says, it is actually the question of experiencing a reflection of the gratitude we would feel if we were personally the subject of the agent's act. Because we imagine ourselves in the recipient's place, Smith argues that we may feel gratitude towards the agent even when the actual recipient feels none. In this way, the double sympathy provides the foundation of the judgement of merit, that is, the judgement that the agent is praiseworthy. On the other hand, when we, as spectators, sympathise with the resentment of the recipient, we also feel resentment towards the agent. This is the basis of our judgement of demerit, that is, the judgement that the agent deserves some kind of punishment.¹⁸

The judgements of merit and demerit are based on what Westermarck regarded as the most significant aspect of Smith's moral theory. Referring to the second species of Smith's moral sentiments, Westermarck explains that our moral approval and disapproval arise not only from our sympathy or lack of sympathy with the agent's motive, but also from our sympathy with the gratitude or resentment of the person acted upon. Because of this, Smith held moral approval and disapproval closely akin to the emotions of gratitude and resentment.¹⁹

In his lectures on British moral philosophy, Westermarck underlines in various contexts that Smith differs from Hutcheson and Hume in realising that the moral sentiments are not mere feelings of pleasure and pain. For Westermarck, Smith's analysis of resentment and gratitude is of fundamental importance for the understanding of the nature of moral emotions. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is 'the most important contribution to moral psychology made by any British thinker', above all, because of 'the emphasis it lays on the retributive character of the moral

17 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 15–16.

18 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 15–16. In the same context, Westermarck points out that in the case of malevolent actions, the formation of spectator's moral judgement may be more complex. When a person hurts or offends another, we may approve the act as right and justified because we sympathise with the agent's resentment. But we might, at the same time, sympathise with the person who is hurt, and this double sympathy complicates the moral evaluation. In Westermarck's reading, Smith suggests that in such cases, our final moral verdict results from a kind of weighing between these two distinct sympathetic emotions.

19 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 16–17.

emotions' (ER, p. 71).²⁰ Smith's account of resentment and gratitude as 'the root-principles of the moral consciousness' resonates with the basic tenets of Darwinian evolutionism: it is 'a circumstance all the more satisfactory to the student of psychical origins as anger towards an ill-doer and friendliness towards a well-doer are mental facts easily explicable as results of natural selection' (Westermarck, 1900, p. 185).

Smith calls this second species of the moral sentiments 'the sense of merit' and 'the sense of demerit'. They are a 'distinct species of approbation and disapprobation' (TMS, p. 67) that arise, in one case, from our sympathy with the gratitude of the beneficiary, and, on the other, our sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer (TMS, pp. 74–75). As some commentators have pointed out, Westermarck was directly continuing Smith's work by suggesting that moral disapproval is akin to resentment and moral approval to gratitude (Ginsberg, 1982, p. 8; Fletcher, 1971, p. 102). To put it more specifically, he developed Smith's account further by arguing that both gratitude and moral approval are forms of 'retributively kindly emotion', whereas all negative retributive emotions are forms of 'resentment'. In this respect, Westermarck's debt to Smith is clear, but what have passed unnoticed are his substantial *revisions* of Smith.

Corrections to Smith's account of the moral sentiments

When developing his theory of moral emotions, Westermarck, above all, simplified Smith's account. Smith regarded the second species of moral approval and disapproval as 'compounded sentiments'. This means that 'the sense of merit' is 'made up of two distinct emotions; a direct sympathy with the sentiments of the agent, and an indirect sympathy with the gratitude of those who receive the benefit of his actions'. Similarly, the sense of demerit is a 'compounded sentiment' which is 'made up of two distinct emotions; a direct antipathy to the sentiments of the agent; and an indirect sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer' (TMS, p. 74–5). In Westermarck's view, the structure of moral emotions is much simpler. First, he combined Smith's description of the two distinct species of moral approval and disapproval – the first of which applies to the propriety and impropriety, the second to merit and demerit – into a *single unified theory of moral approval and moral disapproval as retributive emotions*. Secondly, but related to the first point, Westermarck rejected Smith's complex account of the sentiments of merit and demerit as composed of two distinct emotions. Instead, he construed moral approval and moral disapproval or indignation as *individual emotions*, the former being a type of retributive kindly emotion, and the latter being a type of resentment.

20 Both in his lectures and published writings, Westermarck alludes to Polybius and the eighteenth-century philosopher-psychologist David Hartley as the precursors of the theory of morality based on resentment and gratitude. However, it was Smith who made the retributive nature of the moral sentiments the cornerstone of his moral theory (Westermarck, 1914, Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith, pp. 17–18; ODMI, pp. 42–43, 95; ER, pp. 69–71).

These differences appear also in Westermarck's lectures. It was precisely Smith's notion of double sympathy – with on the one hand the motive of the agent and the resentment or gratitude of the recipient on the other – that was an unnecessarily complex description of how moral emotions arise. To begin with the former, Westermarck agrees with Smith in that 'our retributive moral emotions are surely due in great measure to the motive we ascribe to the agent'. However, he rejects Smith's theory of imaginative changing of places, arguing that 'I cannot believe that in general we put ourselves in his place and reproduce the act, with ourselves as the agent, in the complicated way Adam Smith seems to assume we do'. Second, according to Westermarck, Smith gave too much importance to the spectator's sympathy with the emotions of the recipient. This is because the sympathetic origin does not cover the whole scope of moral emotions. As we have seen, one of the main points in Westermarck's analysis of how people make moral judgements is that there are expressions of moral emotions where sympathy plays no role at all.²¹

Compared to Smith, Westermarck *broadens* the scope of morally relevant behaviour. This concerns especially the role of emotional disgust in morals. As discussed in Chapter 3, these 'disinterested antipathies' or 'sentimental aversions' are equally important facts of moral psychology as our capacity for sympathy. It is not unusual that emotional aversions leading to moral indignation concern phenomena such as differences of taste, habit and opinion. Similarly, people may disapprove of anything unusual, new or foreign. In other words, the point Westermarck makes against Smith is that people feel very often the desire to punish another person even if no harm is caused. Westermarck has a point in that facts of this kind are difficult to explicate by means of Smith's theory of moral judgement, because it delimits the resentment-based retributive moral disapproval to the spectator's sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer. Similarly, according to Westermarck, Smith ignored the role of 'disinterested likings', instantaneous positive reactions leading to moral approval without the influence of sympathy.

Finally, according to Westermarck, Smith neglected the exploration of the relationship between the moral sentiments and the moral concepts. In particular, 'as far as the concept of duty is concerned he is not clear that it is grounded on the emotion of disapproval, not approval'.²² As we have seen, in Westermarck's analysis of the notions of duty, failure to do what is, in a given society or in individual experience, regarded as one's duty has a tendency to arouse moral disapproval in others or oneself (ODMI, p. 136; ER, p. 125). Smith writes more vaguely about the emotional basis of the moral concepts. 'What is agreeable to our moral faculties', he says, 'is fit, and right, and proper to be done; the contrary wrong, unfit, and improper. [. . .] *The very words, right, wrong, fit, improper, graceful, unbecoming, mean only what pleases or displeases those faculties*' (TMS, p. 165, emphasis added).

21 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 21.

22 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 21.

The impartial spectator

One of the central issues of Westermarck's moral theory is the question of what distinguishes the moral emotions from nonmoral retributive emotions – moral disapproval from anger and revenge, and moral approval from gratitude. This question is also at the heart of Westermarck's interpretation of Smith. In his lectures, Westermarck argues that for Smith, moral approval is very similar to gratitude and moral disapproval to resentment, but they are not identical. As we have seen, Smith suggested that the moral sentiments linked to punishment and reward arise from our sympathy with the recipient's gratitude or resentment. However, since we, as spectators, are not a party to the action judged, our resentment or gratitude towards the agent is 'disinterested' and 'impartial'. Consequently, according to Westermarck, Smith argues that moral approval and disapproval differ from resentment and gratitude by their disinterestedness and impartiality. In addition, Smith derives these special characteristics of the moral sentiments from sympathy. It is our capacity for sympathy that enables us to feel disinterested and impartial resentment and gratitude on behalf of others.²³

Westermarck's interpretation of Smith's account of the moral sentiments may be further illuminated by his interview granted to a British freethinker journal in 1898. Here, Westermarck acclaims Smith because 'he was the first to demonstrate how moral indignation is resentment raised to the level of impartiality'. Westermarck explains that we are, broadly speaking, inclined to consider such acts as wrong which in some way cause, or are supposed to cause, pain to another person. 'When we see or imagine pain suffered by another', he continues, 'we feel the pain by sympathy, and we resent it in moral indignation. Our resentment, however, is not based on personal grounds; it is impartial'. Referring to our judgements that the agent is praiseworthy, Westermarck states that '[i]n a similar way Adam Smith argued that our recognition of another's merit was an impartial feeling of gratitude' (Gould, 1898, p. 186). In this way, as Westermarck argues in his lectures, Smith derives the impartial character of moral judgements directly from the nature of the moral sentiments.²⁴

This account serves as an introduction to another key element of Smith's moral theory, his conception of the impartial spectator. As several commentators have pointed out, by distinguishing disinterestedness and impartiality as the empirical characteristics of moral emotions Westermarck was significantly influenced by Smith's notion of the impartial spectator.²⁵ However, insufficient attention has been given to how Westermarck actually interpreted Smith's impartial spectator and how the notion figures in Westermarck's theory of morality.

23 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 19. For Smith's distinction between non-moral resentment and resentment as a moral sentiment, see Griswold (1999, pp. 117–118); MacLachlan (2010).

24 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 20.

25 von Wright (1982, p. 48); Stroup (1982a, pp. 142–143); de Waal (2001, pp. 351–352, 386; 2006, p. 20); Arnhart (2001, p. 22); Hultberg (2012, pp. 251–252).

In what follows, I first show that for Westermarck, Smith's impartial spectator primarily represents how people in practice make moral judgements on others. More specifically, it is about what kind of emotions people feel when they observe the behaviour of others from the position of a non-involved bystander. Secondly, but related to the first point, I explain how Westermarck draws on Smith's impartial spectator in his notion that moral emotions involve certain generality, which is proposed in the *Moral Ideas* as the third characteristic of moral emotions, along with disinterestedness and impartiality. Lastly, I discuss how Westermarck's account of the self-directed moral emotions shows clear allusions to the impartial spectator in Smith's theory of self-evaluation.

Like Hume, Smith's account of how moral judgements arise is built upon the spectator's perspective. For Smith, the impartial spectator represents, first and foremost, the point of view from which moral judgements are made (Campbell, 1971, pp. 127, 145; Raphael, 2007, pp. 16–17). This shows also in the many synonyms Smith uses for the term. As Campbell (1971) sums up, Smith speaks interchangeably of 'spectator', 'spectators', 'bystander', 'a third person', 'every attentive spectator', 'every impartial bystander', 'every impartial spectator', 'every indifferent person', 'every indifferent bystander' or simply of how 'we' react when we are in the position of a non-involved spectator (pp. 134–135). In other words, 'all of us are regularly Smithian impartial spectators' (Frazer, 2010, p. 95). This was also Westermarck's position. As he puts it, when we observe the actions of others without being personally involved, 'we pass our judgements as impartial spectators'.²⁶ Westermarck's affinity with this line of interpretation is worth emphasising because more often than not, Smith's notion of the impartial spectator is associated solely with the workings of conscience.²⁷ It is this sense of the phrase, not anything related to conscience, that Westermarck has in mind when he states that 'Adam Smith made the resentment and gratitude of the "impartial spectator" a corner stone of his theory of the moral sentiments' (ER, 70; also ODMI, p. 43).

In Westermarck's view, however, Smith's idea of the impartial spectator does not completely succeed in describing the typical position from which moral judgements are made. In the interview referred to above, Westermarck points out that 'the phrase is not strictly correct, for we, as spectators, are never quite impartial'. Like Smith, Westermarck believes that the moral emotions are distinctively 'disinterested', meaning that the person who feels them is not personally party to the

26 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 19. For different readings of Smith's impartial spectator, see Haakonssen (1981, pp. 56–62); Otteson (2002, pp. 42–50; 2013, pp. 49–51). Despite some differences in emphasis, Haakonssen and Otteson suggest that when making moral judgements, we strive to achieve the viewpoint of the impartial third party, the perspective that goes beyond the personal interests and biases of everyone involved.

27 Examples on this are numerous. See e.g. Broadie (2006, pp. 179–186); Ross (2010, pp. 172–173); Schneewind (1998, p. 390); Muller (1993, chapter 8). Campbell (1971) is one of the few Smith scholars who, like Westermarck, gives equal attention to the both sides of Smith's notion of the impartial spectator.

situation, unlike the agent and the person acted upon. However, our moral emotions vary considerably in intensity depending on whom the action we observe is directed to. In reality, our emotions are greatly influenced by the fact that our 'indignation is stronger when we see pain inflicted on some persons than in the case of others' (Gould, 1898, p. 186).²⁸ Similarly, Westermarck (1900) highlights the 'generally overlooked' fact that 'the impartiality which a moral emotion presupposes is not absolute, only relative, that is, impartiality within certain limits' (p. 185). In his view,

Absolute impartiality, I understand, would concede to all sentient beings equal rights. But where is it to be found, and who would look upon it as equitable? The moral estimation recognises classes with different rights. It requires impartiality within the limits of each class, but those limit themselves may have been drawn with the greatest partiality. If, for instance, a savage censures as wrong a homicide committed upon a member of his own tribe, but praises as meritorious one committed upon the member of another, he attributes different rights to the members of the respective tribes, and his indignation and his approval possess not only that personal disinterestedness, but at the same time that relative impartiality, which is required by tribal morality.

(Westermarck, 1900, p. 185)

Perhaps for this reason, in Westermarck's formulation, moral emotions are characterised by 'apparent impartiality', meaning that they are not 'knowingly partial' to the person who feels them (ODMI, pp. 103–104; ER, p. 93). In different contexts, Westermarck brings out that in reality our moral judgements regularly favour one party over another, but usually not consciously.

The gist of Westermarck's interpretation of Smith's impartial spectator is that it is by examining the reactions of the spectator that we can best understand and describe the nature of the moral emotions. According to Westermarck, Smith argues that the moral sentiments are simply the kind of emotions non-involved spectators feel towards some other person when they sympathise with the resentment or gratitude brought about by that person's action.²⁹ Besides simplifying Smith's account of the two distinct species of moral approval and disapproval, Westermarck provides a more systematic and detailed account of what distinguishes moral approval and disapproval from nonmoral gratitude

28 For Westermarck's account of the variability of sympathetic emotions, see ODMI, pp. 104, 120–123, 373, 429, 433, 713–715; ODMI II, p. 129.

29 Campbell (1975) provides a similar account of the moral sentiments. He emphasises that for Smith, the moral sentiments are 'those sentiments felt by the spectator of human behaviour, the spectator being the ordinary person when he is in the position of observing the behaviour of any person with whom he has no special connection and whose behaviour does not affect him any more than it affects anyone else. Such a spectator is impartial only in the limited sense that he has no personal involvement in the situation which he is observing' (pp. 70–71).

and resentment. As discussed in Chapter 3, moral approval and disapproval 'differ from kindred nonmoral emotions by their *disinterestedness, apparent impartiality, and flavour of generality*' (ODMI II, p. 739, emphasis added). Westermarck analyses these features one by one, and, after this, attempts to explain these elements by tracing their psychological and social origins. To summarise Westermarck's position, the moral emotions are characterised by 'disinterestedness' – because they are felt as independent of any benefit to oneself; 'apparent impartiality' – because we feel that we do not favour any of the parties involved, and 'a flavour of generality' – because we assume that the majority of people respond the same way. It was obvious to Westermarck that people feel the same moral emotions also when they are personally the subjects of good or bad actions.

The influence of Smith's impartial spectator is also explicit in Westermarck's notion that moral emotions have certain generality. This means that when a person 'pronounces an act to be good or bad, he gives expression to something more than a personal opinion, that his judgment has reference, not only to his own feelings, but to the feelings of others as well' (ODMI, p. 105). The 'flavour of generality' refers to people's assumption that their emotions and judgements would be shared by others whom Smith would call impartial spectators. As Westermarck puts it, moral emotion includes 'some vague assumption that it must be shared by everybody who possesses both a sufficient knowledge of the case and a "sufficiently developed" moral consciousness' (ODMI, pp. 104–105). In other words, we implicitly assume that 'the act must be recognised as good or bad by everybody who possesses a sufficient knowledge of the case' (ODMI, p. 6). By 'sufficiently developed moral consciousness' Westermarck means nothing but the person's subjective experience that his notion would be shared 'by all those who see the matter as clearly as he does himself' (ODMI, p. 123). Whether we feel moral indignation on behalf of others, or because we have been wronged ourselves, our emotions derive their moral character from the fact that 'we assume that *any impartial judge* would share our views' (ER, p. 93, emphasis added; also ODMI, p. 104).

Self-directed moral judgements

Thus far we have discussed Smith's account of how people pass moral judgements on others. It was, however, equally important for Smith to study how people judge themselves. This is evident already from the subtitle Smith added to the fourth and subsequent editions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 'An Essay towards an Analysis of the Principles by which Men naturally judge concerning the Conduct and Character, first of their Neighbours, and afterwards of themselves'. The core of Smith's argument is that moral judgements of oneself are formed in the same way as our judgements of others (TMS, pp. 109–110). He argues that when judging of others, there is always a real person into whose shoes we imaginatively place ourselves. However, when judging ourselves, we imagine ourselves in the position of a spectator, as another person who observes us at a distance (Broadie,

2006, pp. 179–180). As Westermarck puts it, ‘the impartial spectator appears also in Smith’s theory of conscience’.³⁰

As discussed in the previous chapter, Westermarck held the view that the capacity for self-evaluation develops through a temporal sequence during human childhood. He explains that Smith ‘agrees with Hume, and with good reason, that our first moral judgements do not concern ourselves but other people whose actions we observe as impartial spectators’.³¹ To clarify this point, Smith suggests that similarly ‘[o]ur first ideas of personal beauty and deformity are drawn from the shape and appearance of others, not from our own’. However, as a natural part of individual development, we begin to understand that other people equally observe and judge ourselves. As a result, Smith says, ‘[w]e become anxious to know how far we deserve their censure or applause’, and the only way to find this out is ‘to examine our own passions and conduct, and to consider how these must appear to them, by considering how they would appear to us if in their situation’ (TMS, pp. 111–112). In other words, as Westermarck puts it, at some point we begin to observe and judge ourselves ‘as if we were external spectators of our own conduct’.³²

Westermarck explains that, according to Smith, this process takes place by dividing ourselves into two persons, as the spectator and the agent. Similarly, when discussing his theory of moral emotions and sympathy in his lectures on ethics, Westermarck points out that ‘the being whose emotions I sympathise can, in a way, be I myself; I can put myself in the disinterested spectator’s position and observe my emotions as if they were emotions of another person’. This is, for Westermarck, the sociopsychological setting in which the self-directed moral emotions arise.³³

More specifically, Smith argues that when we divide ourselves into two persons, the first person is the ‘spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation’. On the other hand, the ‘other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of’ is ‘the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion’ (TMS, p. 113).³⁴ For Smith, our self-directed moral judgements are based on the imaginary spectator’s sympathy or lack of sympathy with our emotions. In other words, I approve of my action if I, by adopting the spectator’s standpoint, sympathise with my emotions. If I do not sympathise, from the spectator’s perspective, with the emotion that motivates my action, the disagreement of emotions prompts me to disapprove of myself morally.

30 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 19.

31 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 19.

32 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 19.

33 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 19–20; Westermarck (n.d.) (Box 80: Lectures, Ethics: fragmentary pages), no pagination.

34 In this respect, Smith’s conception of the impartial spectator foreshadows George Herbert Mead’s concept of the self (Costelloe, 1997).

Westermarck emphasises that the impartial spectator in Smith's theory of conscience is only a representative of the actual external spectators. That is, self-directed moral judgements represent our assumptions about how other people would respond to our actions. However, because the impartial spectator is a product of our own imagination, the imagined spectator is better informed about our motives and intentions than actual observers.³⁵ By this Westermarck alludes to Smith's central idea that the judgements of conscience reflect the *reactions of the imagined spectator who has the same information* about our motives and intentions as we have (TMS, pp. 113–116). This explains why the judgements of conscience may have superior authority when they oppose the reactions of actual spectators. In human experience, Westermarck concludes, the impartial spectator is the inner judge which we may invoke when others judge us unjustly and short-sightedly.³⁶

Like Westermarck's theory of the other-directed moral emotions, also his account of the self-directed moral emotions is distinctly indebted to Smith's impartial spectator. For Westermarck, 'besides being disinterested and apparently impartial, remorse and moral self-approval have a flavour of generality' (ODMI, p. 107). Regarding self-evaluation, Westermarck simply takes the impartial spectator as representing the human mental ability to observe and evaluate oneself from the perspective of others. Compared to Smith, Westermarck's invocation of impartial spectator is very direct and general. He simply argues that moral approval and disapproval of oneself 'is never at its best except when it is accompanied, in the consciousness which has it, with the knowledge or belief that it is also socially shared' (ODMI, p. 107).³⁷ Smith's conception of the fundamentally social character of self-evaluation is forcefully echoed in Westermarck's remark that 'almost separable from the moral judgments which we pass on our own conduct seems to *be the image of an impartial outsider who acts as our judge*' (ODMI, p. 107; ER, p. 95, emphasis added).

Emotions in scientific inquiry

Smith and Westermarck also share a view of scientific inquiry as a process based on, and structured by, emotions. Westermarck held in high esteem Smith's ([1795] 1980) account of surprise and wonder in his posthumous essay *The Principles which lead and direct Philosophical Enquiries; illustrated by the History of Astronomy*.³⁸ These sentiments are at the core of what may be called Smith's psychology of science. In this essay, Smith attempts to reveal the 'principles' or

35 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 20.

36 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), p. 19. For an account of the development of Smith's notion of the impartial spectator as conscience between the different editions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, see Raphael (1975, pp. 87–94; 2007, pp. 32–42).

37 This is a quote from James Baldwin's (1897) *Social and Ethical Interpretation in Mental Development*.

38 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Adam Smith), pp. 3–4.

regularities which 'lead and direct' philosophers or scientists in their enquiries. By philosophy Smith means 'the science of the connecting principles of nature' (Smith, [1795] 1980, p. 45), which we today would call the natural sciences. According to Smith, objects and events that are unfamiliar or unexpected prompt in us the sentiments of surprise and wonder. Surprise is an unpleasant mental state that disturbs the usual smooth state of imagination. It is followed by wonder, which may manifest itself in 'that staring, and sometimes that rolling of the eyes, that suspension of the breath, and that swelling of the heart'. These bodily reactions are 'natural symptoms of uncertain and undetermined thought' (Smith, [1795] 1980, pp. 33, 39–40).

Because surprise and wonder are disturbing mental states, they prompt the philosopher or scientist to find explanations for those objects or events that are unfamiliar or unexpected. For Smith, successful explanations calm the mind and give rise to the pleasing and relieving sentiment of admiration (Smith, 1980 [1795], pp. 38–42).³⁹ Philosophy, or science,

by representing the invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, endeavours to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances, to allay this tumult of the imagination, and to restore it, when it surveys the great revolutions of the universe, to that tone of tranquillity and composure, which is both most agreeable in itself, and most suitable to its nature.

(Smith, [1795] 1980, pp. 45–46)

While Smith saw hypotheses and theories as products of surprise and wonder, Westermarck gives the same role to 'logical feeling'. Following the Scottish philosopher Alexander Bain and the Danish psychologist Alfred Lehmann, Westermarck suggests that mutually incompatible ideas of the same object or event give rise to a feeling of pain (ODMI II, p. 109). This feeling is the 'driving force' prompting researchers to establish hypotheses, and in the history of science we can see repeated attempts to reconcile ideas that have seemed incompatible. The unpleasant logical feeling also *guides* the research process. If new observations or results are not consistent with the initial hypothesis, the disturbing feeling prompts the researcher to alter or reject it and to formulate a new one guiding the research. The fact that scientists may end up with results that will contribute to human knowledge is largely thanks to the logical feeling guarding them from jumping into conclusions. This is because incompatibility between the hypothesis and observations gives rise to the unpleasant and disturbing feeling that prompts researchers to change their assumptions.⁴⁰ Smith's and Westermarck's

39 For more detailed accounts of Smith's view of science, see Campbell (1971, chapter 1); Fleischacker (2004, chapter 2); Berry (2006).

40 Westermarck (1914) (Box 78: Lectures, Psychology), pp. 178a; Westermarck (1915) (Box 80: Lectures, Psychology II), pp. 168–171.

accounts bear a resemblance to the pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce's theory of inquiry, according to which scientific work, both at the individual and the collective level, is characterised by the alteration between the states of doubt and belief.

As Alexander Broadie (2009) puts it, for Smith, surprise, wonder and admiration are not only basic to science, for it is a sequence of sentiments 'that we all live through perhaps many times daily – we are surprised at something, we wonder what the explanation is for what surprised us, and we are relieved to discover the explanation' (p. 228). Similarly for Westermarck the logical feeling is of fundamental importance to human (or even animal) existence. All human thought and action 'are based on the premise that an object is what it is as long as the same conditions prevail, that A cannot be A, and not-A at the same time'. The inconsistent observations of the same object or event give rise to emotional responses that lead organisms to direct attention to potential threats in the environment. In this way, for Westermarck, the logical feeling is an outgrowth of elementary emotional reactions to what is strange and unfamiliar.⁴¹

41 Westermarck (1915) (Box 80: Lectures, Psychology II), p. 169.

Concluding remarks

The beginnings of Westermarck's study of morality were characterised by Darwin's writings on social instincts and the moral sense. Although Westermarck soon diverged from Darwin's approach, many of the emotional and social tendencies Darwin linked with the social instincts appear in his mature theory of morality. Both of them locate the key stages in the evolution of human sympathy within early social groups characterised by social affection, mutual solidarity and reciprocity. However, while Darwin invokes group selection and the evolutionary advantages of sympathetic and altruistic dispositions in warfare, Westermarck's outline of the expansion of sympathy beyond family and kin relationships is based on reasoning about the gradual dispersion of kin altruism and evolutionary benefits conferred by reciprocity and cooperation at the individual level. Westermarck's moral theory is expressly founded on emotional dispositions that are widespread among animals. Following the basic principles of Darwinian biological evolution, he realised that our retributive emotions are gradually moulded modifications of old ones, so that the uniquely human moral emotions – including the mediating psychological mechanisms through which these emotions arise – are outgrowths of emotional and social characteristics we share with many other animals.

Similarly, Westermarck analysed in his early moral theory several issues that proved essential for his mature account of morality. These include the idea that moral judgements are based on specific moral feelings or emotions, the exploration of these emotions in the context of everyday social interaction, and understanding of the importance of perspective-taking (i.e. understanding the situation of others) in moral evaluation. The latter developed later on into his theory of sympathy, where it was the capacity to share the feelings and emotions of others that became the key element. In addition, Westermarck recognised already at this stage that our emotions of moral approval and disapproval are social also in the sense that they are intertwined with social customs or norms of behaviour, through which they are typically felt as justified.

The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas provides a comprehensive analysis of the nature and manifestations of the moral emotions. Westermarck's aim is to show that moral approval and disapproval, together with the nonmoral retributive emotions such as gratitude and revenge, are an inextricable part of human behaviour and all forms of social life. Westermarck also deals with the

self-directed moral approval and disapproval which possess the same characteristics as our emotions directed towards others. To sum up, due to the disinterested, impartial and general nature of the moral emotions, they involve a certain kind of experience of self-transcendence. When people react morally and make moral judgements, these responses do not stem solely from personal standpoints, but they are seen as possessing more objective, universal validity. The judgements of good and evil are perceived as self-evidently right and shared by one's social reference groups, as they in many cases in fact are. Moral experiences are closely related to Westermarck's view of the objectification of emotions as an essential part of moral judgements. In everyday thinking, different behaviours and human qualities are regarded as inherently right or wrong, independent of the approval or disapproval they evoke. One of the advantages of Westermarck's analysis is that by taking the nature and characteristics of the moral emotions into consideration, it helps us to understand why '[f]ew things are more liable to arouse people's moral indignation than opinions that differ from their own, and when the disagreement is about morals or religion, the indignation may certainly have a claim to the epithet righteous' (ER, p. 161).

A central part of Westermarck's theory of moral emotions deals with their immediate causes. In his view, moral emotions typically arise from our sympathy with others, or retributive emotions that may spring to life even when the original cause of them in others is unknown to us, or emotions of liking and disgust which often are evoked by behaviours which do not affect other people in any way. In addition, people often disapprove of actions that deviate from social customs and norms, whose emotional and habitual nature I have aimed to clarify.

One of the chief aims of this study was to show the fundamental role of sympathy in Westermarck's moral and social theory. Westermarck analyses the nature, structure and sources of sympathy, but, above all, he is *doing* something with his conception of sympathy. Besides studying sympathy as part of how moral emotions arise, sympathy lies at the heart of Westermarck's analysis of the genesis and maintenance of moral norms. Sympathy is also key to his views on the evolutionary origins of human social bonds, social solidarity, and the circle of moral concern. Hitherto, however, Westermarck has been entirely neglected in the scholarship on sympathy in the history of human sciences and philosophy. This omission is unfortunate especially because sympathy is one of the key research subjects where Westermarck links David Hume's and Adam Smith's moral thought with Darwinian evolutionary thinking, thus introducing and modernising their legacy in the sphere of early twentieth-century social sciences and moral philosophy.

Throughout this book, I have been concerned to draw attention to the significance of reciprocity in Westermarck's moral-psychological and sociological work. Anthropologists from Bronislaw Malinowski ([1922] 2002, [1926] 1978) and Marcel Mauss ([1954] 1990) to Claude Lévi-Strauss ([1949] 1971) and Marshall Sahlins (1972) have addressed reciprocity as a system of exchange, giving and receiving gifts and favours, which cements social cohesion and group relations. Westermarck represents a different viewpoint, the core of which is the detailed

examination of the *emotional system underlying reciprocity*, the deep-rooted human desire to reward and punish people for their actions. Besides two-person interactions, Westermarck devotes much attention to multiparty interactions where human beings observe the actions of others as third parties. What emerges is a conception of society as a nexus of social relations where people constantly observe and inform each other on how they or some others have been treated. At the same time, Westermarck outlines a theory of the *norm of reciprocity*, the social expectation that good deeds should be reciprocated in one way or another. For these substantial contributions and his endeavour to place these issues in the Darwinian evolutionary framework, Westermarck should be recognised as a major theorist of reciprocity.

In addition to these topics, Westermarck developed a wide-ranging theory of moral responsibility. He did not approach it as an abstract philosophical question but as an empirical phenomenon, as something reflected in people's actual reactions. The conceptions of responsibility are for Westermarck decisively dependent on the manifestations of retributive emotions, which, in turn, are influenced by their cognitive aspects. His work provides a rich and in-depth analysis of the different dimensions of conduct and character in relation to the workings of retributive emotions. For its essential parts, Westermarck's anatomy of responsibility is based on the further development and integration of Hume's and Smith's legacy into his own theory of moral emotions.

Since Westermarck emphasises the social nature of the moral emotions, addressed to others or oneself, it may seem that he ignores actions motivated by a sense of duty which is independent of the emotions of others. However, for Westermarck, the inner 'sense of obligatoriness' that 'filled Kant with the same awe as the star-spangled firmament' is a real moral-psychological phenomenon. It is nevertheless only one of the many motives of action, 'and variable like all others: In some instances it is the ruling power in a man's life, in others it is a voice calling in the desert' (ODMI, pp. 14–15). Westermarck analyses dutiful action in the light of his theory of moral emotions. In some persons, the respect for the moral law 'possesses a higher value than anything else', which is 'an expression of a strongly developed, overruling moral consciousness'. In other words, the felt authority of duty 'results from the *strength of the individual's own moral emotions*'. At the same time, it seems evident that for most people, morality is 'much less the outcome of their own feelings than of instruction from the outside' (ODMI, pp. 16–17, emphasis added).

Without using these terms, Westermarck examines the moral emotions both from the proximate and ultimate viewpoints. The distinction between proximate (the 'how'-questions) and ultimate (the 'why'-questions) explanations is central to evolutionary biology and psychology (Mayr, 1997; Scott-Phillips, Dickins & West, 2011). Proximate causes relate to the immediate environmental and situational factors that trigger certain behaviour and, above all, the psychological or physiological mechanisms that enable it. Ultimate causes attempt to explain why a particular trait or behaviour exists within a species by looking at its possible evolutionary function. They address the question why a certain trait or behaviour might

have been advantageous in terms of fitness consequences, and therefore favoured by natural selection. When Westermarck is describing the manifestations of moral emotions in different situations, he is concerned with the immediate proximate causes. When looking into why retributive emotions, both in their nonmoral and moral forms, exist in the first place, he is concerned with ultimate evolutionary explanations. Similarly, in his exploration of the role of sympathy in parental care and the formation of larger social groups, he is offering ultimate explanations. It is often emphasised that the distinction between proximate and ultimate causes is central to Westermarck's theory of incest avoidance, but the same mode of reasoning characterises his approach to morality also more generally.

In his evolutionary reasoning, Westermarck tries to avoid constructing speculative scenarios of the prehistoric past. His premise is that social phenomena and regularities found in the later or contemporary social arrangements cannot be viewed as proving their existence in the early stages of human history. We cannot postulate the existence and prevalence of some phenomena in the past unless we may assume that the *cause or causes* of these phenomena have been universally operating. Consequently, drawing on anthropological, psychological and biological knowledge – including cross-species comparisons – we must first try to 'find out the causes of the social phenomena; then, from the prevalence of the causes, we may infer the prevalence of the phenomena themselves', assuming that these causes have been operating 'without being checked by other causes' (HHM, pp. 2–4; HHM I, pp. 9–10, 20; Westermarck, 1936a, pp. 236–237). This methodological principle underlies all of Westermarck's evolutionary explanations.

Westermarck's theory formation has clear points of resemblance to the way of thinking known as methodological individualism. In this view, all social scientific explanations must be ultimately derived from the actions of human individuals. In response to Durkheimian criticism, he emphasises that 'even collective behaviour' – customs, beliefs or emotions more or less common to a particular group of people – 'involves the actions of individuals' (Westermarck, 1936a, p. 237; see also HHM I, pp. 8–12, 17–18). In his opinion, the study of 'origins' constitutes an essential part of sociological theoretisation, since emotions not only shape and influence human action in an individual level but also give rise to, structure and maintain social phenomena and institutions.

Because of his psychological emphasis, Westermarck has often been criticised for reducing social and moral phenomena to individual psychology. However, he does not deal with individual consciousness without social environment and society. In Westermarck's thinking, social habits, customary practices and especially the emotions of others make up the social setting that human beings encounter as already existing and within which they operate. Westermarck's sociological critics have failed to appreciate how fundamentally his work on morality centres around the role of social influence on human emotions, beliefs and actions. Similarly, although Westermarck does not examine morality from an individual development perspective, he places a great deal of significance on the role of upbringing and socialisation in the formation of moral beliefs. Because humans have a strong tendency to adjust and adapt to the ways of thinking and feeling

prevalent in their social environments, our moral ideas are significantly shaped by them. At the same time, it was clear to Westermarck that since the moral emotions always involve a cognitive dimension, individual moral beliefs and judgements with regard to different behaviours and phenomena may change in the wake of knowledge and reflective thought.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Westermarck's work anticipates many key issues and approaches in modern evolutionary biology and psychology. Westermarck's ideas on family and kin relations are supported by William Hamilton's (1964, 1996) seminal work on kin altruism and 'inclusive fitness', which shows the importance of the degree of genetic relatedness to the evolution and maintenance of altruistic behaviour (Segerstråle, 2013; Kappeler & van Schaik, 2006). His exploration of retributive emotions has an obvious parallel with Robert Trivers's (1971, 2006) theory of reciprocity as a key mechanism for the evolution of cooperation between nonkin.¹ Trivers tells us that when developing his ideas on the role of emotions in human cooperation, he simply organised the empirical information 'around the obvious psychological categories, such as sympathy, gratitude, and moralistic aggression' (Trivers, 2002, p. 13) – in other words, exactly the same emotional dispositions on which Westermarck built his moral theory. Like Westermarck, Trivers also analyses other morally relevant emotions such as guilt and forgiveness, and his work provides excellent tools to update Westermarck's legacy.

Similarly, Westermarck's theory of retributive emotions and moral norms bears a resemblance to Richard Alexander's (1987) account of 'indirect reciprocity', which constitutes the third cornerstone of contemporary evolutionary approaches to altruism and cooperation. Developing the idea implied by Trivers (1971), Alexander recognises that a large part of human social life is based on indirect forms of reciprocity where rewards and punishments come from others than the recipient of the beneficence or wrongdoing. Like Westermarck, Alexander focuses on third-party reactions and argues that certain behavioural tendencies are supported, while others rejected, because much of human interactions occurs 'in the presence of interested audiences – groups of individuals who continually evaluate the members of their society as possible future interactants'. Indirect reciprocity revolves around reputation 'and results in everyone in a social group continually being assessed and reassessed by interactants, past and potential, on the basis of their interactions with others' (Alexander, 1987, pp. 85, 93–94). In contemporary moral psychology, Westermarck's basic conclusions on the emotional basis of morality are supported by the intuitionist-affective approach to moral evaluation (Haidt, 2001, 2007). According to this view, moral judgements are post hoc rationalisations of our intuitive, emotional reactions. It is also noteworthy that emotions and behaviours associated with reward, punishment and a sense of fairness, studied

1 For a brief discussion of Westermarck and Trivers's work on reciprocal altruism, see de Waal (2006, pp. 17–20). Vernon Smith (1998) provides an insightful comparison of Adam Smith and Trivers.

by experimental economists, mean much the same as Westermarck's retributive moral emotions.

This study has focused largely on the importance of 'origins' – emotional and sociopsychological origins in particular – in Westermarck's thought. However, the *Moral Ideas* carries the term 'development' in its title, in addition to 'origin'. I have discussed one of these trends of change postulated by Westermarck in more detail, i.e. the expansion of sympathy and the resultant widening circle of people to whom moral rules are applied. Another key part of the development of moral ideas concerns the growing influence of reflective thought on moral judgements. We sketched the issue for the part of moral responsibility, but a similar developmental pattern is visible in Westermarck's exploration of several other issues. These kinds of questions could probably be studied within a much more fixed historical and sociocultural frame. However, in Westermarck's case, the description of moral development is clearly the weakest part of his work on morality. While the central aspects of Westermarck's moral and social theory are not dependent on his comparative materials, his examination of the changes in moral beliefs in the frame of long-term civilisational development relies directly on all sorts of written sources and the unreliable conclusions drawn from them. At the same time, these developmental aspects of Westermarck's thought should be studied in more detail because such an undertaking would shed light on his social and cultural evolutionism, which has evoked many contradictory interpretations.

Moreover, although the influence of religious and magical beliefs on moral judgements is central to Westermarck's *Moral Ideas*, we are lacking an explication of this side of his work. As the study of religion bulks large in Westermarck's oeuvre also more generally, the scholarship on Westermarck would benefit greatly from a comprehensive study of his forty years of research on the topic. Because Westermarck deals extensively with the relationship between the moral emotions and law, it would be useful to integrate his views on the origins and character of legal systems and criminal law into the theoretical traditions of the sociology of law. Westermarck's philosophical commentators should pay more attention to his ambitious efforts to demonstrate the emotional background of objectivist ethical theories, which constitute a central part of his moral philosophy.

The objective of this book was to clarify and explicate the foundations and central elements of Westermarck's theory of morality. I have not argued that his analyses and explanations are from some angle – psychologically, sociologically or philosophically – the best possible. That said, I believe his writings abound with descriptions and explanations which have enduring value for understanding human moral behaviour and social life. Westermarck was a very empirically grounded scholar who was not shy to give seemingly simple, common-sense interpretations of social institutions (Ginsberg, 1961, p. 190). The readers of the *Moral Ideas* come constantly across observations that they recognise in themselves and others, along with explanations that intuitively make sense. While such views are subjective and potentially misleading, the kind of familiarity that is difficult to verbalise is often an attribute to a sharp-sighted and useful sociological theory. It indicates that a theorist has succeeded in identifying something essential to social

reality and then organised these observations into a form of such a theory that exposes the phenomena and regularities under consideration. In a way, a successful theory *sensitises* us to things basically already familiar to us by gifting them with an exact form and making them visible.

The variety of topics bound together in Westermarck's moral and social theory is exactly of this kind. They concern the way people are touched and roused to gratitude when met by benevolence and helpfulness, moral disapproval when faced with a wide range of behaviours and events. Human beings experience a spontaneous desire to inflict pain on a wrongdoer, and a disturbing feeling that follows if the wrongdoer gets away without punishment. Everyone knows what righteous anger feels like, as well as the feeling that something is self-evidently good or evil. We sympathise with friends and strangers. We must deal with moral disagreements, disapproval elicited by differences of opinion, moral indignation that intensifies and spreads within groups and disgusts that appear irrational. Many aspects of human action and interaction are regulated by socially binding customs and related moral emotions. People have an intuitive understanding of the importance of reciprocity in many areas of social life, and the relationship between remorse and forgiveness. We all make subtle judgements of responsibility and appraise people's praiseworthiness and blameworthiness in relation to various mitigating and aggravating circumstances. People are aware of what is typical and average behaviour in different situations in their sociocultural surroundings, and pass moral judgements in relation to this common standard. The list could go on and on.

This study has brought out the vast and ambitious scale of Westermarck's work on morality, even when focusing only on its moral-psychological and sociological aspects and leaving the moral-philosophical details and implications aside. A British sociologist, Ronald Fletcher (1982), asked nearly forty years ago, 'where is the study of the elements of men's moral consciousness which is more wide-ranging, contains a clearer theoretical basis, and brings together more empirical evidence, and more satisfactorily, than this?' (pp. 209–210). The question is still valid, not least because Westermarck's writings serve as an example of sociological theory-building that is not organised around the dualisms of nature/culture and animal/human which continue to penetrate much of the social scientific enterprise. At the time when the relationship between biological and social sciences is subjected to a wide-scale re-evaluation, Westermarck's pioneering large-scale synthesis deserves much more attention and acknowledgement than it has received so far. It seems safe to predict that his basic conclusions on the significance of emotions in human sociality and morality will retain their relevance – 'unless mankind changes radically some time in the future' (Pipping, 1984, p. 330).

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